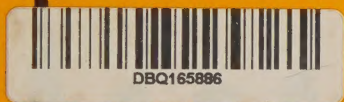


# Ruben and Ivy SEN



by LOUISE JORDAN MILN  
AUTHOR OF  
MR. WU

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# RUBEN AND IVY SEN

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*Author of "In A Shantung Garden,"  
"Mr. and Mrs. Sen," etc.*

The delightful Mrs. Sen and her children, Ruben and Ivy, are the central figures in this new story of Mrs. Miln's which treats dramatically of the results of marriage between East and West.

Children of an English mother, and a wealthy Chinese father, who died when they were very young, Ruben and Ivy are faced with difficult and often heart-breaking problems. In spite of her beauty Ivy hates her Chinese body and her Chinese name and is bitterly ashamed of her parents' marriage. But Ruben, passionately Chinese in spirit yet in appearance entirely English, worships the memory of his father and adores his mother. From this complexity of loves and hates Mrs. Miln draws vivid, sharp character pictures. When both Ruben and Ivy are inevitably called upon to decide the question of marriage for themselves they answer it differently.

*With truth and clarity the author pictures this struggle of great emotions and greater instincts—against both an English background and the Chinese settings for which she is so justly famous.*

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Rep







RUBEN AND IVY SÊN

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

THE SOUL OF CHINA  
IN A SHANTUNG GARDEN  
MR. AND MRS. S<sup>^</sup>EN  
THE FEAST OF LANTERNS  
MR. WU  
THE GREEN GODDESS

# RUBEN AND IVY SÊN

BY  
LOUISE JORDAN MILN



*"I go to prove my soul!  
I see my way as birds their trackless way.  
I shall arrive!"*

NEW YORK  
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY  
MCMXXV

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*Had the date of the death of Sên King-lo, the father of Ruben and Ivy, as implied in "Mr. and Mrs. Sên," been adhered to strictly in this present novel, it would open considerably later than 1925. The author has preferred to ignore the dates of the previous story rather than to place this story in years of which she can know nothing. "Ruben and Ivy Sên" is not intended as a sequel to "Mr. and Mrs. Sên," though it grew out of the earlier story.*





TO MONA FROM HER MOTHER



# RUBEN AND IVY SÊN

## CHAPTER I

THE servant who let him in one Tuesday in May knew that Whitmore had come to make Mrs. Sên an offer of marriage, and when the man let the peer out half an hour later, Jenkins had no doubt that his mistress had refused the offer.

How he knew, Jenkins could not have told you. It was years since Jenkins had listened at door ajar or keyhole—not since he'd been a very under footman. Mrs. Sên did not hobnob with her maid. Avenues of intimate information open to servants in many households simply did not exist in Mrs. Sên's homes. But Jenkins knew.

Every one had known that Lord Whitmore was going to propose to Ruby Sên. It had been patent for more than a year. And only three people had been at all doubtful of what Mrs. Sên would answer: the three who knew her best. Sir Charles Snow, his wife, and Ruben—Ruby's son—had wondered whether or not Mrs. Sên was going to marry Whitmore. Ivy had no doubt that her mother would. Society took it for granted, and, since Whitmore never had shown the slightest inclination to let any other woman lead him to the matrimonial altar, Society approved the prospective arrangement.

The Sên servants had had no doubt of what was coming, not even Tibbs, a recent acquisition below stairs, who had

only seen her mistress once and by luck, through the larder window.

When Jenkins had announced Whitmore in the morning-room the man had been as confident as the suitor. Half an hour after, when Jenkins let Lord Whitmore out, Jenkins had been as surprised as Whitmore, and very much more disappointed.

Jenkins had served Mrs. Sên for nearly ten years, and it was his uniform experience that when Mrs. Sên said a thing she meant it—and went on meaning it. When Jenkins closed the front door on Lord Whitmore's departure, Jenkins had given up the match.

John Whitmore had done nothing of the sort. He had never asked a woman to marry him before, and he had no intention of letting this one woman off from doing it. Give her time he'd have to, that was obvious. But he was going to make her marry him, and before very long. A man does not need to delay his wedding day needlessly at fifty. He cared everything for this one woman. He was determined to have her for his wife, and greatly as he wished it for himself, his determination was in no way selfish.

He was sure that their marriage would be almost as much for her happiness as for his own, and even more for her advantage, a satisfactory and comfortable settlement. It was all very well for her now, but she'd grow old some day like the rest of the world. It stood to reason her two children would marry. She'd be far happier with him ten or twenty years from now than she would alone. And in the meantime, whether she knew it or not, it would be a great advantage to Ruben and Ivy and a very great help to their mother, for the boy and girl to have a father—such a father as he'd be to them. He was very fond of little Ivy, and any man would be proud to have Ruben call him father.

When they learned that their mother had refused Lord

Whitmore—it was he himself, not Mrs. Sên, who told them and told the Snows that she had done so—Ivy was furious and bitterly disappointed, but Ruben was glad.

Lady Snow was disgusted, but she was not surprised; Ruby Sên never would surprise Emma Snow again. Emma always had known how apt Sir Charles' cousin was to take life's bit resolutely in her teeth. Once at least she had bolted with it. And in all their almost lifelong acquaintance, which from the first had been a sisterly intimacy, Emma only once had known Ruby to change her mind. Lady Snow had no hope that Mrs. Sên would change it now.

Sir Charles Snow was not surprised either, and he was glad in spite of his sincere liking and respect for Whitmore. He doubted if any second marriage could satisfy a woman who had been the wife of Sên King-lo. But he saw as clearly as Lady Snow the advantage to his cousin of marriage with Whitmore. He believed that the friendship and support of such a husband as John Whitmore would be a very great advantage and bulwark to Ruby in the difficult times he foresaw when Ruben and Ivy were a little older. He knew how such a marriage and stepfather would soothe Ivy. Sir Charles Snow was very sorry for her, and tried his manliest to love misplaced little Ivy as much as he pitied her. He tried to love her even half as much as he loved Ruben—and failed.

Snow in some half obscure way felt that the sacrifices Sên King-lo had made—the sacrifice of life itself and the heavier sacrifice of bitter exile—were in part justified, a little atoned for, by his wife's refusal to marry again.

When Ruby Gilbert, living there with them, had convulsed Washington by marrying a Chinese, Sir Charles Snow had disliked it even more than his wife had, and had opposed it strenuously. But he had opposed it from a sense of cousinly duty and not because he had much hope that his opposition

would have any effect. He had disliked it most for his girl cousin, but he had dreaded its consequences most for his friend Sên. He had been sure that its consequences would be disaster and that it was Sên who would pay. Lady Snow had not opposed it at all. She was ultra-practical and she had seen no reason to attempt the impossible.

Snow had proved right, as he often did. It was Sên King-lo who had paid and not the English girl whom he had married. Charles Snow and a wise old woman in Ho-nan and Kow Li, Mr. Sên's servant in Washington, who had a Chinese curio shop now in a side street near the British Museum, knew that Sên the Chinese had paid. No one else knew—unless Sên's widow did. Charles Snow often wondered whether his cousin Ruby ever had had even an inkling of what the marriage that her husband had kept so happy for her had cost Sên King-lo.

For Sên's sake Charles Snow, though it grieved him, had not exactly regretted Sên King-lo's death—fourteen years ago now—in Surrey. Emma Snow had liked Sên cordially; she had had to go on doing so even after the "abominable" marriage; but she had not been able to ignore—in her own cool head, for she never had voiced it—that King-lo's death had cleansed her kinswoman's social slate of a regrettable record. In her own way, lighter than Snow's but as sound, Lady Snow had been staunchly loyal to Ruby and King-lo and to the marriage that never had ceased to rasp her. But she had hated it from first to last. She had always felt it a detriment not only to herself but to her two children, Blanche and Dick, and had felt that it would have injured and compromised any social standing less secure than Charlie's and hers. And because she felt as she did about their cousin's Chinese marriage, Emma Snow's sunny, unflinching loyalty had been a braver thing than Sir Charles



Snow's. Lady Snow felt that Ruby had made a sorry sacrifice and had lost caste, had taken an appalling risk with criminal willfulness. Snow had had no doubt that the sacrifices, the smirch of caste, the ghastly risk, had been Sên's tenfold more than Ruby's.

Only one detriment remained to Ruby now in Lady Snow's opinion—Ivy. Mr. and Mrs. Sên had had two children, both living now with their mother in old Kensington. Ruben the elder was Saxon fair, a very charming boy. Ivy, two years younger than Ruben, was intensely Chinese in appearance, and a handful. Lady Snow loved Ruben and was proud of him; but she was ashamed of Ivy Sên, because of what the girl's unmistakably Chinese face told and emphasized. Emma Snow was clear-eyed enough to see that the Chinese-looking half-English girl was almost incredibly lovely; and the woman was too well experienced in social England to have any doubt that Ivy, rich, accomplished and quick, would be a social sensation and success. But Emma Snow could not forgive the girl her Chinese face, though Heaven knows she tried to. After all, Lady Snow was not responsible for an adamant prejudice that was also a wholesome common sense—something she was unable to shake off because it was stronger than she and part of her own not inconsiderable strength. Even that wise old diplomat, Charles Snow, who made no mistake about the greatness and fineness of the Chinese, who admired and loved them, and who held himself honored in his many Chinese friendships, winced at Ivy's slant black eyes, yellow skin and the pretty musical lilt of her up-and-down "courtyard" voice.

Whether Mrs. Sên regretted her only daughter's Chinese appearance, or was gratified that Ruben her son looked and seemed so English, not even her Cousin Charles knew, who knew her better than any one else, not even excepting Ruben.

But both Sir Charles and his wife knew that Mrs. Sên loved her children passionately and they believed, mistakenly, that she gave them an equal love.

Ruben Sên worshiped his mother; he gave her a tendance and fealty that a Western mother rarely wins. And not even Sir Charles Snow—always watching, because of a promise he had given dead Sên King-lo—suspected that there was one thing that Ruben Sên, even now, loved more passionately than he did his mother.

We are so used to ourselves, so accustomed to our own blemishes of mind and body that we carry them tranquilly enough until some sharp knock shows them to us vividly, somewhat as others see them. Little Ivy Sên was self-centered and self-satisfied, even for one of her sex. And though looking in the glass was one of her most favored pastimes at a very early age, she was ten or twelve before she once wondered why she looked so little like her mother, or realized in the least how queerly her face differed from all the other girls' faces! When she did realize it a looking glass tortured her. But she looked into it more than ever, obsessed by it much as lepers are!

Ivy Sên both loved and hated her mother, and Mrs. Sên knew it. She accepted her child's love gratefully; suffered her child's hatred and gave no sign. Ruby Sên did all that she could to lighten the cross that she knew Ivy carried. But there was one thing that she would not do for Ivy; she would not marry Lord Whitmore—or any other man.

## CHAPTER II

THE day that Ivy came to her, appealing for her help to overcome "Mother's wicked obstinacy," and broke down and wept out what until now she had never told any one,

Lady Snow came nearer really caring for Chinese-faced Ivy than she ever had before, and much nearer than she could have believed possible.

"I could almost forgive her; I think I could," Ivy pleaded, "if she would marry him. Why doesn't she? There is every reason why she should—and not one single reason not to!"

"Forgive your mother! You have no right to say that, or to think it," Lady Snow said sternly—more sternly than she felt.

"*You* know that I have!" the girl insisted passionately. "How would you like to have a Chinese face? You'd loathe it, as I do. You do not like me; and I like you for it—for not liking me—not liking me because I look Chinese."

"Haven't I been good to you, Ivy?"

"Oh, yes," the girl's shrug of contempt was Eastern—a "courtyard" petulance—"as good as ever you could bring yourself to be. But you've had to *try*—had to *remember* to be kind to me every time. Every one is good to me. I'm rich and so is Mother, and she goes everywhere and knows every one worth knowing—that's why. I don't want people to be good to me. I could kill people when they pity me—and perhaps some day I will."

"No one pities you, child. No one could."

"You do!"

Emma Snow made no reply.

"Everybody pities me that has any sense. I have no doubt that my own mother does. She ought to. Ruben doesn't—he envies me. But Rue's mad. Cousin Charles never shows that he does, but of course he pities me too, for all his liking for Chinks. Every one *must* pity me who cares for me the least little bit—every one who isn't a lunatic like Ruben. I don't want people to be good to me. It's impudent of them, and it is not what I want. There is only one thing on earth I want. I want to be English!"

"You are half-English, Ivy," Lady Snow reminded her gently.

"*Half!*" All the agony of the sore old interracial tragedy was packed in the girl's one bitter word.

Emma Snow's heart ached for the girl and she said the most healing thing she could think of. "You are very beautiful, Ivy." She laid a caressing hand gently on Ivy's shoulder.

They were alone in Lady Snow's own sitting-room, she with a bit of embroidery she'd taken up desperately, as a refuge for her eyes, when Ivy's words had become dangerous. The girl was hunched on a stool at the other's knee in a willowy attitude that was pretty but not Western. Ivy was facing the other, and not so near that she could not look up at her very directly.

"I used to think so," Ivy Sên said sadly, "when I used to look in the glass years ago—saw how I looked, and didn't know what I looked *like*. But now I do know and my own face is the most repulsive sight I ever see. I dare say I'll be the rage—for one Season—when Mother presents me; but what sort of a rage? A joke! People will like to look at me and laugh and point me out to each other as the daughter of the English woman who married a Chinaman. 'Miss Sên the Society mongrel'; that's what they'll call me!"

"Ivy!"

"It's what I am. And it's what they'll call me. 'See! there she is—the mongrel beauty!' Oh, I'll be the rage all right! How would you like to hear Blanche called a mongrel? Do you think that Rupert Blake would have fallen in love with her, let alone married her, if she'd been a half-caste—and looked it!"

The woman's eyes filled with tears. She knew that her easygoing but socially exigent son-in-law certainly would not,

and she bent her eyes on her work, and hastily stitched a blue petal on a red rose.

"Ivy," she said slowly, "I want to help you—truly I do, dear. I want to persuade you to help yourself; it's the only way, your only way out. Accept it, Ivy, once for all and make the best of it. You don't like it; a great many girls would. Take the good of it, Ivy—there's lots of good, and good-luck too, in it—and put your foot on the rest of it—what you think the bad of it. Don't let it lame you. Really you shouldn't! Above everything else, don't let it make you bitter. Nothing spoils a girl like being bitter. Begin on little things. Don't say 'Chink,' dear. It isn't nice. Your cousin Charles won't even let me say 'Chinaman'; he broke me of it years ago. Say 'Chinese,' dear."

"Chinks!" the girl on the stool retorted viciously. "That's what they are. I loathe them. I am a Chink, Cousin Emma; and it won't wash off. Pretty! Oh, yes, I dare say I am pretty in an odious Chink way. But there isn't a girl in England who is English and looks English, that I wouldn't change places with to-morrow—now—this hour—and thank God for letting me do it."

"Hush, dear."

"I would! Have you seen our new kitchen maid? Her name is Tibbs, Ada Tibbs; she has a bad cast in one eye; she hasn't any eyebrows—scarcely any eyelashes. I nearly had a fit when I saw her. She has the most hideous face I have ever seen. But it is English! I would change places with Ada Tibbs, and be thankful and glad of the chance to."

"You wouldn't like it when you had," Lady Snow said gently.

"I'd like it better than being what I am—looking as I do."

"You don't know what you are saying, dear."

"I know what I am feeling."

Lady Snow sighed.

"Can't you make Mother do it? Can't you? She ought to. It wouldn't wash the Chinese off my face—nothing ever will do that—but it would whitewash it a little. Mother owes it to me. I could almost forgive her, if she would. And I want to love my mother! Can't Cousin Charles make her?"

Lady Snow shook her head slowly, folding away her needlework, smiling sadly. She was thinking of twenty years ago, when Sên King-lo and Ruby Gilbert had fallen in love, and had married.

"I have known your mother for more than thirty years, Ivy, and I never have known any one even once able to 'make' her do anything against her will. I can't quite see why you are so terribly anxious that your mother should marry Lord Whitmore. Your mother has about everything that a woman can have to make life comfortable and interesting and beautiful too—for her and for you and Ruben. She is enormously rich. She still is a beautiful woman. Her position is as secure and desirable as any woman's in England."

"Because her Chinese husband is dead!" the girl interjected.

"Listen to me, Ivy. Your father was a very great gentleman and I never knew a more charming man. Sir Charles loved and respected him. Sên King-lo was a great man, Ivy; a noble by birth, and entirely noble in nature."

"Don't! Don't tell me about him. I can't stand it."

Emma Snow's eyes fell at the tragedy in the girl's. "He loved you very dearly," she said sorrowfully. She was too bitterly sorry for Ivy Sên to reproach her beyond that.

"Don't!" the girl shuddered.

Lady Snow unfolded her needlework again, to steady her-



self with something mechanical and because she could think of nothing not quite hopeless to say.

"Why did Mother do it?" the passionate voice went on suddenly.

"Do what, dear?" But Emma Snow knew.

"Marry a Chinese man!"

"They loved each other very dearly."

"It was horrible!"

"You might not have thought that if you could have known him and seen how he was held, dear. I'll be honest with you, Ivy; we were not glad but it was impossible to feel that our cousin had married beneath her. Why are you so anxious to have a stepfather, Ivy? Most girls are not."

"I am—to have an English father—and to have an English name."

"But your mother changing her name wouldn't change yours."

"I'd see that it did! He'd be willing. I know he would. To be his daughter, and be called by his name, would make me seem a little more English. That's what I want, above everything on earth."

Lady Snow doubted if Ruby Sên would allow her children to discard their father's name—felt rather sure that Ruby would not—even if she did marry Whitmore. But there was no need to annoy the excited girl by telling her so, particularly as Emma was convinced that Mrs. Sên never would marry Lord Whitmore.

Perhaps Ivy suspected the other's thought for she demanded, "Do you know what I am going to do, the day I am twenty-one? I am going to call myself by some other name—some decent English name. And I shall marry the first Englishman that asks me the day after I'm of age and my own mistress, if any *Englishman* ever does—*any* Englishman—a footman, a sweep or a potman!"

Lady Snow laughed lightly though she could have cried more easily, and touched the other's face softly with her hand. "Don't be a goose, little one," was all she said. But Lady Snow's heart ached bitterly for Ivy Sên.

### CHAPTER III

ON the surface Mrs. Sên lived pleasantly and calmly, as scores of such Englishwomen do—London, Surrey, moderate travel, ample means, good health, "troops of friends," not a worry; a radiant, if placid, life, peculiarly free from grave care or petty annoyances. At forty she was much more than good-looking and she had charm, the personal charm that had been hers from childhood, and the deeper charm of the woman who has accepted experience and has assimilated and used it wisely. Sir Charles Snow, probably her most trusted friend as well as her kinsman, often questioned if his cousin lived less smoothly in her hidden depths of being than on the untroubled surface. After fifteen years of identical questioning Snow had found no answer, reached no conclusion.

The rich widow was completely her own mistress; by her husband's gift wealthy in her own right, her fortune under her sole control, she the only guardian of their two children. To be sure, her husband had died as he had lived, a Chinese subject. By Chinese law—and international equity could not well have disputed it—all that Mr. Sên had left, including even his widow and their children, belonged to his family in Ho-nan. Whether or not those British-born children could have maintained British citizenship as against Chinese allegiance, had the Sêns in Ho-nan raised and pressed the point, Ruby, the dead Chinese man's widow, was indubitably a Chi-

nese subject. She could only regain the British rights of her birth by remarriage with a British subject, or possibly, in the new dispensation which has given woman so much—and taken from her so very much more—by naturalization. Mrs. Sên had shown no disposition to do either; and the question of her right to the guardianship of her boy and girl, her right to bring them up in England, and as English, had never been raised. The Sêns in China had made no move, expressed no wish, offered no advice. Gifts came to Kensington once in a great while, always gifts of value. But with one exception all those gifts had been sent to Mrs. Sên herself and not to her children. Mr. Sên's grandmother had sent Ivy Sên some splendid birth-gifts, too priceless to have passed into the girl's own keeping even yet. Except for that, no Chinese relative of Ruben and Ivy Sên had approached them even indirectly. Chinese minds had enough upheaval to contemplate at home now without reaching across the world for more. Mrs. Sên's rule of them and her own life was undisputed.

But Snow often wondered.

He knew that Ruby had not forgotten the man she had so willfully married. The woman was no ingrate, nor was she dull. Only an abnormally treacherous woman could have put such a mate out of her life, merely because he had died bodily. And only an inordinately dull soul could have forgotten in the bagatelle of fifteen years the charm and chivalry that had never failed her in the crucible of married intimacy. The heyday of so great a spirit as Sên King-lo's can know no passing. It cannot die. Ruby Sên was neither treacherous nor dull.

But had she ever realized all that her Chinese husband had been? While he lived had she suspected anything of what he had given her, done for her, sacrificed for her? Snow

believed that she had not. But had it come to her, even in part, since Sên's death, as past truth often does come to us after many years? He could not tell.

How much did Ruby Sên look ahead—*how clearly?* She gave no sign.

How were the two children of the mixed marriage going to turn out? What would their lives be? Motherhood had lain lightly upon his cousin as yet. Would it press upon her more heavily presently?

When he was dying their Chinese father had insisted to Snow, whom he had trusted peculiarly, that Saxon-fair Ruben in mind and nature was intrinsically and intensely Chinese, but that Chinese-looking Ivy was as intensely English. It was clear that the dead man had been right about his baby daughter. Ruben was keenly interested in all things Chinese and eagerly anxious to learn all he could about Sên King-lo. Was it curiosity, or was it trend? Was it individual, or was it race?

Snow was sure that there were rocks and dangerous shoals ahead for poor little Ivy. Did her mother know it?

Were there rocks or shoals ahead for Ruben? Did his mother suspect that too?

Ivy Sên had been educated chiefly by governesses and they had found it difficult work but never dull. Ruben had gone from public school to his father's old college in the Cam-side 'Varsity, and both at school and at Cambridge Ruben Sên had grooved into the life with his fellows as easily and neatly as any English one of them all.

Charles Snow suspected a good deal about Ruben; but he *knew* nothing, except that Ruben Sên was upright, quietly sunny, exceptionally able, tenderly fond of his sister, lover and worshiper of his mother. Many English boys are fond of their sisters, especially an only brother of an only sister; and if love-of-mother is a Chinese characteristic, it is not an

un-English trait. Snow understood Ivy perhaps better than he did Ruben. He was not sure that he understood Ruben at all. The old diplomat with years of Anglo-Chinese experience back of him, many Chinese friends, firmly-rooted Chinese sympathies, was sorely sorry for little Ivy Sên. Had he cause, he often asked, to be even sorrier for Ruben? Had blue-eyed, white-skinned Ruben the bitterer, deeper cup to drink?

How could he best serve Ruben and Ivy Sên?

His own children needed little even from him; nothing more than a fatherly and friendly hand on their shoulders now and then. Both Richard and Blanche were true to type and all went well and creditably with them. Snow still felt great interest in national and in international affairs. But he held a watching brief now. He had been out of office for nearly a year. He had served his king and his country truly and well in all four of the globe's quarters, and in the cabinet as well as at the Foreign Office. But "party" no longer lured him. He thought not too well of either party now. England would "muddle through" of course. Charles Snow was too English to doubt it for a moment. And he hoped to God that old China would "muddle through" too! But keenly as he tried to watch and read all the shifting tangles of East and West, Old and New, the man's most immediate interest, though he had to veil it carefully, was to serve Ruben and Ivy Sên, and by doing it to keep faith with Sên King-lo, who had trusted him and in dying had bequeathed to Snow a trouble that he could not take with him into the churchyard.

## CHAPTER IV

MRS. SÊN intended to present Ivy at next season's first Drawing-Room. It was about that the four women were talking earnestly over the strawberries and cream of tea in the garden one July afternoon at the Blake's place in Dorset.

Snow and his son-in-law, Rupert Blake, and Whitmore were more amused than interested in the keen discussion of the important palace toilet, but Ruben Sên lounging on the grass near his mother was vitally interested. Ruben "loved clothes" like the veriest woman. Color and line fed Ruben Sên, and he never was cold to ornament.

"A débutante need not necessarily wear white," Lady Snow urged, "quite a number don't."

"Yes; and I wish you wouldn't," Ruben broke in eagerly. "One of the lovely girlish colors would look ever so much better. White looks flat by artificial light, Ivy. Don't you think so, Mother?"

Ivy darted her brother a tiny sinful glance from her narrow eyes. She knew what Rue'd like her to wear. Then she sighed softly, for she knew well enough that she'd look best dressed as Ruben would have chosen—dressed in a blaze of colors, shapeless sacks of gorgeous embroideries, jewels of three or four colors, her black hair worn in some fantastic fashion. But she had no intention of looking her best at the cost of wearing a Chinesey dress. She answered gently enough. This was one of Ivy Sên's gentle days, and for all that she had said to Lady Snow less than a year ago, Ivy loved her beautiful mother very dearly, and rarely hurt her deliberately.

"I'd rather have it all white, Mother—like other girls."

Ruby Sên put her hand lovingly on her daughter's shoul-



der. "It shall be as white as ever you choose, Baby."

"I wonder why I never have seen you wearing white," Whitmore said to Mrs. Sên, as he took her empty plate. "I don't remember that I ever have."

"It's rather young wear for forty odd, don't you think?" Mrs. Sên laughed.

"Rubbish!" Emma Snow scolded. "Mean to tell me that I look mutton-dressed-as-lamb?" Her cool gown was snow white. "I shall wear white when I'm eighty—on days like this."

"And go to dances—and *dance*, won't you, Cousin Emma?" Ruben demanded.

"I most certainly shall."

"Don't you care for white, Mrs. Sên?" Lord Whitmore persisted.

"I am like Ruben, I like plenty of color. And in our country we only wear white for mourning!" John Whitmore had vexed her an hour ago, or she would not have answered him so. Whatever Ivy Ruby Gilbert had been, Mrs. Sên almost never was catty. And when she felt her daughter's fingers stiffen a little under hers she wished she had left it unsaid. The man had been a bore of late and being bored always infuriated her. Ruby Sên had outlived several faults. She could not outgrow that one. Moreover, harmless and conventional enough as the man's questions had been, his tone had been a little possessive, and for that she had flicked him—but she had not meant to touch Ivy on the raw. Ruby Sên looked after her child with regretful eyes as the younger Ivy slipped quietly away and across the garden. Oh, if only Ivy need not feel it so! Their lovely Ivy, ashamed of her own loveliness!

Ivy Sên went slowly across the grass almost to the other side of the great garden until she was in the thick of the beech trees.

When Lord Whitmore came upon her suddenly almost an hour later the girl was crying bitterly. He had seen Ivy Sên in a tempest of tears before this—and more than once. They were old friends and staunch allies. In a sense they were fellow conspirators. He sat down beside her on the garden bench and laid a fatherly arm about her shoulder.

“Quite right, dear; cry it out,” was all he said.

The girl did. These wild tears were past gulping back. It would have choked her.

“Why can’t they let me forget it—ever?” she wailed when her tears were nearly spent. “I was happy till they reminded me. I’ve loved being here; I suppose I’ve no business to feel at home anywhere—but I always do here with Blanche and Rupert. I care more for them than for any one else—next to mother and Rue, and I love Dorset so dearly. I wish we lived here always. Half the Dorset people never heard of China. Then they had to go on about ‘color,’ and ‘lovely flowing lines,’ and remind me! What they meant was that the clothes English girls wear would look ridiculous on me. ‘Natives’ need lots of red and orange—that’s what they meant! And then Mother had to go and speak as if she were tar-brush too—which she isn’t!”

“Of course not. And your mother is very nearly as brunette as you are, Ivy.”

“Brunette!”

“I wish you didn’t mind,” Whitmore said gently.

“So do I,” the girl retorted bitterly. “Mind it! Girls born as I was ought to be smothered at birth. If my courage was half as much as what I suffer over it, I’d take the suicide-way out. Yes; I would—and have every right to—precious more right than they had to bring me into a world in which there is no place for such as Ruben and me. Perhaps I shall too—do it—some—time. Oh, I have thought of it. Or, I’d

be a nun—only I'd hate it! And they wouldn't have me!"

"No vocation? I quite agree," Whitmore spoke lightly to cover an emotion of sympathy he would not show.

"There ought to be convents for half-castes! The League of Nations ought to start one. That would be one useful thing to their credit anyway!"

"I predict you'll have an awfully good time—your first season, and afterwards—" her friend said, changing the subject rather lamely.

Ivy sighed rebelliously and unhappily.

"I wish you'd smoke, and give me one."

Lord Whitmore obliged her in both particulars, looking over his shoulder in their most probably vulnerable direction as he held out his cigarettes to Ivy. Sixteen-year-old Ivy was not forbidden an occasional cigarette—but Mrs. Sên preferred them to be very occasional, and in selected society.

"I don't care whether I have a ripping time or a perfectly horrid time, Lord Whitmore—if only some one will want to marry me."

Whitmore was distressed, but he was not going to show it; and he only partly understood. He had no doubt whatever that every girl wished to be married, and that most girls were greedy for suitors. But it distressed him to hear any girl say it.

Perhaps Ivy Sên divined this and probably her own taste also disallowed it, for she added apologetically as well as petulantly, "Oh, let me talk to you, say just what I want to! I've only let myself 'go' about it once before in all my life, nearly a year ago, to cousin Emma. It's choking me—it often is; let me talk to you about it; do!"

"Of course; talk away, child; say everything you wish to. But, Ivy, take it from me that you need not have any anxiety about Mr. Right; he'll appear promptly—sure to. Give him

time to get here and give yourself time to be sure that it is Mr. Right. You'll have dozens of suitors; be careful not to take the wrong one."

"I don't care whether he's Mr. Right or Mr. Wrong—not tuppence. Mr. Anybody's all I ask for, if only he'll marry me. You," she added before the man could get in a word, "you do still want to marry Mother, don't you?"

"More than anything in all the world." Whitmore met the girl's anxious, beseeching eyes steadily.

"I wish you'd make her then."

"That is just what I am going to do."

"I wonder," the girlish voice was openly dubious. "Tell me something—would you want to marry my mother if she had had a Chinese father—and looked it?"

The Englishman laughed tenderly before he said earnestly, "Yes, Ivy, even if she were a Zulu lady."

"I don't believe it! And I shouldn't like you if it were true. You couldn't! No nice man could. You say that plenty of men will be ready to marry me, and perhaps they will, poor men—adventurers and nincompoops. No man of your sort or Rupert's will. They couldn't. That's why I say Mr. Anybody—any man that will take my money in payment for making me Mrs. Anybody English."

"You will not need to bribe your way into wedlock, Ivy. Many a man of our own sort will love you—bound to—and not give two hoots for your blessed money."

Ivy Sên shook her head sadly.

"I don't believe it!" she said again. "I'll have to take a derelict or an idiot."

"God forbid!"

"I wish He had forbidden my birth; He ought to have," Ivy cried passionately. "If only I *looked* English, I wouldn't mind it half so much. Why couldn't Ruben look this way? I believe he'd like to, and why couldn't I look as he does?"

No one on earth would ever suspect Ruben of having Chinese blood, would they?"

"No one," the man admitted.

"But I believe he *is* a little Chinese. And I am English! Every atom and fiber of me is English. I love every blade of grass that grows in England—every leaf on every tree, every gravestone in the old village churchyards—the cattle in the pastures, the little thatched cottages, the long, leafy lanes; even when Mother has taken us to Italy and Spain—my poor yellow face wasn't quite so noticeable there, and I had the comfort of knowing that it wasn't—even then, much as I enjoyed it, I was terribly homesick all the time for England. I am sorry for every one who isn't born English. To me there is no other thing half so proud and beautiful as being an English man or woman. Oh, it's hard to have to pity myself because I am only half English, and don't look as if I were English at all! I wonder if you can understand, even a little, how hard it is!"

Whitmore nodded. He would have given many acres to have known how to comfort Ruby Sên's daughter.

"Dear," he told her, with his hand on her hair, "how I wish you were my daughter! And I hope you will be."

Ivy caught Lord Whitmore's other hand and gripped it pathetically. "Would you truly let me *be* your daughter? Could you feel as if I were?"

"Try me." As the man looked at her, the answer was sufficient.

"Oh, that helps me! You wouldn't be ashamed of me?"

"I'd be awfully proud of you, little daughter."

"God bless you!" The girl's voice choked; her tears were near again. "You'd let me be called 'Ivy Whitmore,' wouldn't you?" she whispered.

"Love it."

"Me—with an English name! a truly English name!"

The girl drew a long breath, as if she were drinking slowly the wine of the garden's English roses. "It—it—oh—then I'd wait for Mr. Right—wait ever so long. I'm not horrid really," Ivy said eagerly, "but I am so hungry to have an English name. Our name hurts me. I loathe it. It isn't fair that I should have to be called an odious thing like that—and Mother won't even let us leave off that silly fool's cap of a triangle on top of the E. I *am* English, Lord Whitmore, *all* of me except the odious yellow envelope I'm caged in. English! . . . I wonder—would you *adopt* me—make it my legal name?"

"Why, of course, little Ivy," the man told her instantly. But to himself he added, "If your mother would let me do it."

Then, at the look the dark little girl paid him, Lord Whitmore bent down and kissed her gently on her forehead.

## CHAPTER V

THEY had not often seen Ivy so sweetly happy—not for several years. She was quietly gay all through dinner, and afterwards in the drawing-room, on the veranda and at billiards, the soft tinkle of her gentle laughter reminded Sir Charles Snow of another Ivy's delicious giggle that he'd told her, in Washington, was like a Chinese girl's and reminded him of the mirth-music a Chinese girl had made for him in her father's garden in far off Pechilli many, many years ago. Was Lotus still living? He wondered. Even Rupert Blake, the least observant of them there, noticed a new ease, a prettier, more natural brightness and an added sweetness in Ivy Sên when she slipped into the drawing-room looking like an exquisite deep-tinted rose-and-amber tea rose nodding above the leaf-green of her delicate evening draperies. Mrs. Sên's



face glowed softly as she watched her girl; Ruben hovered about his sister like a proud and happy lover and whispered to her as she went through the door he held open when she followed her mother and cousins out from dinner, "You're It to-night, Ivy!"

"Ivy's bad time has passed; her cloud has lifted," Sir Charles commented to his wife a day or two later. "Happy over her palace affair and all the junketings to follow—bless her!—I suppose. And a good job too."

Lady Snow smiled at her husband indulgently and gave no sign of disagreeing. But she did not believe for a moment that Buckingham Palace or the function gaieties to follow had anything to do with Ivy's new and very welcome change of mood. Ivy was up to something. Lady Snow was sure of that. But of what it was she could not even make a hazy guess. She hoped it might last—the pleasant new mood—that was all! But Lady Snow did not expect that it would. Ivy was always happiest here, but Dorset, the Priory, Blanche and Rupert and the adorable twins did not account for this transformation. Emma Snow wondered what did account for it. "I'd think she was in love," Lady Snow reflected to herself, "if there were any one on earth here for her to be in love with, and had forgotten everything else in it; it takes that way sometimes. But there isn't any one here for her to have fallen in love with. And the change came *here*—on Tuesday. She was in one of her black moods when she went off by herself after tea; she had reached the danger-point then, almost a crisis. When she came down to dinner she was happy and companionable and *docile*. What happened to Ivy between tea and dinner?" Lady Snow very rarely, if ever, had seen Ivy docile.

A far wiser, shrewder woman than she ever seemed, very plump, very pretty, her hair still naturally golden at what is erroneously called "the wrong side" of fifty, Emma Snow had

danced through life. But thirty odd years of marriage with a diplomat, most of them spent in the diplomatic circles of important capitals in both hemispheres, had made no mean or shallow diplomatist of the accomplished matron who affected to think all things of international moment "silly old stuff." Ivy Sên and her sudden reformation might deceive the rest of the house party, but it was many years since any one had pulled the wool over the blue, girl-bright eyes of the woman who at fifty-three looked a radiant thirty-five, felt a vivacious twenty and looked forward happily and gaily to sixty, confident and unabashed to eighty.

On Thursday Lord Whitmore tried his luck again.

Left to his own devices, probably he would not have done so just then; not until Ruben had gone back to 'varsity, Mrs. Sên and Ivy back to their house in Kensington, and until the fuss of Ivy's presentation was well over; but Ivy had spurred him to immediate action.

A burning hot day had kept every one else in the house or garden, even Ruben, who was a young salamander. But Ivy had demanded an early ride and Whitmore, always ready for a canter and always glad to oblige the girl, had promptly ordered her horse and his saddled and the two had ridden off together companionably after an earlier breakfast than any but dawn-liking Ruben had cared to share.

It was nearly noon and getting hotter, when they let their horses walk and turned back towards the Priory.

Naturally the girl and her companion chatted as they rode side by side slowly through the welcome shade of the wych-elms that almost interlaced across the narrow, grassy lane. They chatted at first of nothings and more in comradeship than in any quick interest in what she spoke of; then Ivy began to talk about the lovely county. She never tired of talking of Dorset. The county of infinite varieties and more beautiful than varied, was Ivy Sên's Mecca. It delighted the

man to realize how much she knew about it—its flowers and trees, its story, its coasts and streams, its wishing-wells, the slate roofs and narrow lanes of Fortune's Well o'ertopped by the bastions of Verne, its martellos and its manors, its estuaries and its castles, its bridges, its people and their folk lore, the minster, all the tiny pictured churches, tiny cottages, the "big" houses, old families, high roads and byways, hills and woodlands. She knew the names of half the old inns, he found, and their bits of history. The Dorset man's heart warmed at her happy, loving chatter of his county. Something Whitmore said about a tiny village school snuggled on a hillside they saw through a sudden woodland vista led to something about Cambridge—it had been his 'varsity for a few terms before he went to Woolwich; Cambridge led to Ruben.

"Do you like Ruben?" Ivy demanded.

"Thoroughly," the man told her truthfully.

"You are not as fond of Rue as you are of me, though?"

"Not half as fond," Lord Whitmore told her with a laugh.

"There are not many people I care as much for as I do for you, Miss Persistence, and only just one I care more for. But I am very fond of Ruben, for all that; I think him a splendid fellow."

"He's a funny fellow in some ways," the boy's sister said insistently. "Ruben—the real Ruben—isn't much on the surface. I'm all on the surface, I'm afraid, but I don't believe that any one knows Ruben really well—not even Mother."

The girl scarcely could have said anything that would have surprised the man more. To him Ruben Sên seemed as legible as a clearly printed, tersely written page, with no hint in his straightforward personality of the complex that Ivy presented. But he held his silence.

"I wonder what Rue will be—what he'll do. What do you think?"

"Well—you know—he'll have a great deal to look after. Your place in Surrey isn't a big one, but any property is a business of itself in England now; and the Sên fortune would keep any three men busy who looked after it properly; it was huge when your father left it to the three of you; and your mother and Snow have nursed it splendidly ever since. Even the bad, foolish years of the so-called Labor Government did not stop its growth, as they did of most such fortunes, and very nearly to the tune of the genuine laboring man's starvation. It is one of the colossal fortunes now, and intricately ramified; and I don't see Ruben neglecting anything that he ought not to neglect."

"Almost all of it is Mother's and all of it is in her control."

Whitmore nodded. "Yes, I know. But I hope," he said significantly, "to persuade your mother to make the bulk of it over to you and Ruben some day, and not too far off. Why shouldn't she, if I can prevail upon her to do what I so much wish? In any case it's up to Ruben to look after his mother's affairs and his sister's, as well as his own."

"I don't see Rue as a landed proprietor or interested in any sort of business affairs ever. Do you know what I think he'll do? I think that Ruben will roam."

"Good gracious, Ivy; I hope not; it would grieve his mother, I am sure."

"I think so too, and Ruben is devoted to Mother. I don't believe he'll ever care for any one else half so much as he does for her. Ruben's wife, if he ever has one—which I hope he won't—will have to take second place to Mother, and second place a long way off. But I think that very soon Ruben will roam—almost as soon as he comes down from Cambridge, I suspect; and that he will rove about all his life. I think he will have to."

"I hope not," Whitmore repeated. "Why do you say you

hope Ruben will never marry? You indicated the other day that you intend to."

"Yes—and chiefly, as I told you, to get rid of my name. I want Ruben not to marry because I want the name of Sên to die out."

Lord Whitmore made no reply; he thought it would be wiser not to attempt to thrash all that out again; at least not now; his attempt on Tuesday had not been successful, or even encouraging. And they rode on in silence for several moments, he flicking the young leaves of the old oak trees idly, Ivy Sên looking off to the narrowed distance broodingly, as if it were the enigmatical future.

It was she who broke their silence presently. "Did you know my father at Cambridge?" she asked impulsively.

The question surprised Whitmore; that she asked it startled him even. In all the years he had known her—more than a dozen years—he never before had heard Ivy Sên voluntarily mention her father, and certainly had never heard her speak of him as "father." What was Ivy leading up to? Something, he was sure.

"Oh, no," he told her, "we must have been there about the same time, I fancy. But I went off to cram for the Army. And he was at Trinity Hall and I at King's. No; I never met Mr. Sên."

"I wonder if you'd still wish to marry our mother if you had."

So—that was it! "Of course, I should," he said. But—he wondered; Ivy had sown a seed—a seed that might grow a doubt. "Men often marry the widows of men they have known," he told her, smiling at her as he said it.

"Not often—Englishmen—the widow of a Chinaman they have known—have *seen*."

The Englishman riding beside her studied his mare's ears. He had no answer for Ivy.



"I suspect that that is why you *are* willing to marry his widow. Are you never jealous of his memory?"

"Not a mite." Whitmore looked the girl full in the face and smiled again as he spoke.

"You could be very jealous—even of a memory, I believe." Suddenly the man believed it too; he'd never given such a thing a thought before. He flicked meditatively at the oak leaves again. "Do you know *why* you are not jealous of my father's memory? I do. Her marriage was so fantastic that you do not even think of it as having *been*. You know it was so, but you can't realize it. Probably you would, if you'd ever seen him—Mother's Chinese husband—and you would certainly realize it if you ever had seen them together after she was his wife. To you it never *was*, because it was impossible; not the hideous reality it actually was, but a girl's meaningless escapade; a sort of private theatrical masquerade. That's why it does not sting you more. It stings me!"

John Whitmore flushed. He wasn't going to admit it, but he knew that little Ivy had told him a truth, a hard, disconcerting truth, which he had not before suspected. The girl was making him damned uncomfortable. This subject *must* be changed.

"What shall I give you to wear at the Drawing-Room, Ivy? Flowers to carry—whatever flowers you like, or a very special fan, or some pearls—or all three?"

"What I want," the girl retorted bitterly, "is a decent English name to wear at the Drawing-Room." Her face dimpled suddenly, and she laughed softly at him with their yellow lids lifted higher from her not-straight-set black eyes than they often were, and he saw that her eyes were dancing with wicked, impish mischief. "I wish you'd marry me instead of Mother. Will you, if she won't have you after all? Do! Let's elope!"

"Now?"



"Yes; now. I think you might. Will you?"

"No," he laughed back at her, and flicked at her lightly with the soft loop of his crop. "I most certainly will not marry you, Miss Impudence."

"Why not?" Ivy pouted.

"For—one—two—three—four," counting them out on his pommel with the riding crop, "most excellent reasons. First and last, because I wish to marry your mother; second, because in the sanity of fifty-three I object to marrying a sixteen-year-old firebrand; third, because I should very much object to robbing you and Mr. Right; fourth—and perhaps not least—because my heart is very particularly set on having you for my daughter. You would make me an adorable daughter, Ivy; but, between you and me, I have not the slightest doubt that you would make me, or any other old chap of fifty-three ass enough to try it, an utterly abominable wife. And I could give you any number of other excellent reasons."

"Oh—don't trouble to think them up; the four you have furnished will do to go on with."

The girl set a quicker pace then; and they went side by side fairly fast for a mile or two.

There was no one in sight when they reached the Priory door.

Whitmore lifted Ivy down, and she clung to him a moment, and said, "If only you would make her marry you before the Drawing-Room, I'd try to forgive you for jilting me."

The man laughed at her gently, patting her shoulder lingeringly as he said, "That would be quick work, Ivy."

As he went off towards the stables, a bridle in each hand, the girl called after him, "I wish you would try though!"

Whitmore looked over his shoulder back at her as she still stood where he had set her down. A lonely looking little figure she seemed to him, standing there framed in the mul-

lioned old green arch of the doorway, framed in the wealth of climbing ivy that grew as it had for centuries on the old Priory's walls.

He always had known that Ivy Sên was odd; a handful always, sometimes a tempest. Every one knew that who knew the girl. But it never had occurred to him before that her pampered young life was lonely.

No one had thought of her so, except the girl herself and her mother. The mother had known it, and grieved that it was so, for years.

He thought it was a pathetic little figure standing there in the dim wide doorway. And the dark mutinous face was very wistful.

"I'll do my best," Whitmore called back, "if I see a ghost of a chance."

## CHAPTER VI

**L**ORD WHITMORE could not have chosen a less auspicious moment to urge his suit again, though it is equally true that he could not, as far as results went, have chosen a better one. But to-day Mrs. Sên resented his courtship which until now she merely had regretted.

She was tired.

Sir Charles had caught her at breakfast, and insisted upon a long morning devoted to a rigorous inspection of accounts, leases, securities and other documentary paraphernalia of a great fortune. Under her cousin's persistent tutelage widowed Mrs. Sên had become an uncommonly capable business woman; it was in her blood, for that matter, but she never could see why "Charlie" and her solicitors should not manage it all for her, and this morning she had had other plans for the hours between breakfast and luncheon. But Sir Charles

had insisted; and she had yielded. Ruby Sên usually did yield to her cousin in small things. It had been a lifelong habit. In big and more vital things she would yield to no one, not even to Snow himself. And they both knew that she would not.

The day was exceedingly hot. The long business morning had both bored and fagged her.

Luncheon had exasperated her; people had drifted in whom she particularly disliked, and had stayed for the midday meal. Long before peaches and finger bowls Mrs. Sên had been bored to tears.

She fled to the rose-garden as soon as she half-decently could. And there she sank down on a comfortable bench with a soft chuckle of victory and a soothing feeling of security.

In this tiny world of fragrant, glowing roses, a lovely fastness of color and spiced sweetness, her fag and rancor passed. And when a little breeze came and played with the roses, cooling the garden deliciously, she smiled lazily and scolded herself for being an impatient, ungracious woman.

Could roses be lovelier than these of Blanche and Rupert's, anywhere on earth? What about the Vale of Kashmir? Mrs. Sên had been in China. She knew how color could paint an Oriental garden, how perfume could clot one. But she could not think that roses *could* be lovelier, smell sweeter, than these.

Roses always made her think of King-lo; all flowers did. He had worn a vivid red flower in his coat the day they had met, a carnation whose spice had reached and pleased her as they sat next to each other at supper. Their friendship in those first far-off Washington days had been a friendship of flowers. He had sent her violets that first time; most often he had sent her lilies; but often too he had given her roses, always exquisite of color and shape, always exquisitely perfumed, always with their own perfect foliage—never too

many, never too few. The first roses he ever had sent her had been tea-roses. They were the first of his flowers she ever had worn.

She left her seat and paced slowly from bush to bush, searching for a tea-rose she wanted—a tea-rose in memory. And when she found it she held the half-open bud in her hand a long time before she put it carefully in her gown.

She went on through the ordered wilderness of roses, moving slowly, searching carefully for another rose she wanted—a very red rose, just the right red, just the right shape, just the same scent as the roses Lo had sent her long ago because her name was Ruby and because he had loved her, though neither he nor she had known then that he did.

There! Very carefully she chose a ruby-red rose. Very gently she gathered it, and went back to the seat she had left, holding the fragrant ruby rose in fingers that caressed it softly now and then, and fell a-dreaming of days that were gone, of a man that had been dead fifteen years.

What a lover he had been!

And Lo had been her lover, tender and ardent and true, from the first to the last; from his first loving of her until he had died in her arms in their Surrey garden.

Ruben had been but a toddler then, Ivy a baby.

Dear little Ivy! Ivy whom Ruby Sên knew that next to her husband-lover, Sên King-lo, she had loved most of all the world.

Partly, no doubt, it was because she had given so little to others that she had given King-lo so much, but far more it had been King-lo's own quality that had caused her to give so much to her lover and husband; and Mrs. Sên knew that it was so.

Ivy Ruby Gilbert had been a nice girl; intrinsically nice, exquisitely sensitive; but she had married above her—this English girl who had amused Washington, appalled her

friends and gravely troubled her kindred by marrying a Chinese.

She had suspected at the time that he was more than she; she had learned it very surely during her five years of marriage. And now in her maturity, having seen more of her world and watched it shrewdly, widowed Mrs. Sên realized it much more deeply and consciously than she had while King-lo had been with her.

She appreciated him now—a trick that death and memory give; and she even, remembering him, praised him for all his excellence more than was his individual due—held to him as personal virtue much that was racial trait. She was too Western to realize justly that Sên King-lo had been what he was because he was bred and born of a nation of gentlemen; men refined and strengthened for centuries by the spiritual and social good-breeding that Confucius taught.

Mrs. Sên smiled, remembering as she drew the ruby rose across her face, rides they had had by the dimpled Potomac, through the sun-dappled woods of Virginia, on the city's broad tree-shaded streets; their garden in Hong Kong, Sên's grasp of her hand, the sound of his voice, the hold of his arms, the precious lure of his tender eyes, his patience, his courtesy, his exquisite charm, games they had played, confidences at dawn, the day he had told her he loved her—the radiant, secure years he had proved to her that he did.

A squirrel scurried softly through the grass where standard roses grew imperially beautiful from delicate carpets of emerald.

The woman watched the little furry thing, a tender smile on her tremulous lips, a hint of mist in her soft brown eyes. She sighed gently, and looked away—and saw Lord Whitmore coming to her through the beech trees that girdled the radiant rose-garden.

She dreamed of Sên King-lo, and saw John Whitmore.

"Day dreaming?" he asked, as he seated himself, and shied his panama hat not unkindly at a now hurrying little squirrel.

"No," Mrs. Sên said crisply, "*living*. Living contentedly in a very beautiful castle."

"Enjoying it very much—you looked."

"Intensely," Mrs. Sên told him.

Lord Whitmore was not dull. When she had said "*living*" he had known that "*reliving*" would have been the truer word. He gaged her mood, he understood the cool crispness of her tone. And yet—he spoke and risked it; took his plunge, perhaps because the promise he had given little anxious Ivy pushed him over the brink, perhaps because the scent of a thousand sun-drenched roses had gone to his head, perhaps because he so wanted the woman who sat there only half the length of the garden bench away.

"May I have it?" he asked, holding her eyes with his, reaching his hand for the rose she held.

She shook her head very slightly, a queer little smile answering him too, and fastened the ruby rose at her breast.

"Dear—" he urged.

Color came and went like a girl's on the woman's face, an old trick of Ivy Gilbert's face that Mrs. Sên's had lost for years till now—a lovely flushing and paling of sex; and how was the man to know that it was not for him?

But perhaps the other man knew—the man that the wife thought was there.

How was an Englishman to know that they two were not alone there among the roses—he and the woman he loved?

But the woman knew and rejoiced. And the soft glow on her face, the throbbing sweetness her senses felt, were for *him*, standing there facing them, a Chinese man—no ghost—living and visible to the heart of a woman.

"Won't you let me come into your castle—your castle of



contentment—and live there with you?” the Englishman pleaded.

Before when he had urged it he had pressed upon her a dozen reasons that advocated it soundly: companionship for years of maturity and of age, common tastes, Ivy's welfare and Ruben's.

To-day he urged only his love, pleaded nothing of what such marriage might do for her and for her girl and boy, pleaded what it would be to him; promised nothing but love and fealty. All the rest he had promised before, and knew that she knew that promise would hold; now he pleaded selfishly, showing the selfishness, the overmastering urge of what he asked: the strongest appeal a man can make to a woman; the appeal that moves and flatters when all others fail.

“Don't condemn me to spend the rest of my life in loneliness. You must not! Until I met you, I never knew what loneliness was. Since I met you, I have known nothing else, except when I have been with you. We are a long-lived lot, we Whitmores, and so are my mother's people. I decline to let you sentence me to loneliness for, perhaps, another fifty years—to punish me so for loving you!”

“I wish you would love some one else, Lord Whitmore,” Mrs. Sên said a little wearily.

“Can't oblige you—and wouldn't if I could. You were the first; you'll be the last. Oh,” he went on in retort to an odd little smile she gave him, “it is perfectly true. I was precious near forty when we met; and I never had asked a woman to be my wife, and I never had had the slightest thought of doing so—until I saw you. And I never have fooled about—not even as a boy. I have given you all my love.”

“And I gave mine—all mine—more than twenty years ago.”

"I know," Whitmore said nicely, but he flushed slightly, in spite of himself. "But Mr. Sên is dead."

"Not to me," Ruby Sên said proudly.

He waited a moment. Then he laid his hand on hers, so quietly that a modern woman could not resent the hand of an old friend that touched hers so lightly, and asked, "Can you give me nothing at all for the everything that I have given you?"

Mrs. Sên sighed. She was so pitying—not Lord Whitmore, but some woman who had missed him. There were so many lonely women now! So many nice women who would have valued and cherished the splendid gift she would not take or touch. There were not too many men such as he; there were not enough good and charming husbands to go around. Mrs. Sên's heart ached for some lonely woman who had missed this man. She knew so well what marriage *could* be.

But she was growing, selfishly, a trifle weary; it was so perfectly useless to fuss all this over again and even the man's persistence revolted her taste a little. And she longed to be alone again in her little rose-walled castle. She did wish he'd take his No and go!

"Can you give me nothing?" the man repeated. His voice shook in his eagerness, and his hand tightened on hers.

The woman turned in her seat, faced him squarely and shook her head as she gently released her hand.

"Why?"

The question vexed Mrs. Sên. Surely she had told him why clearly, already.

"Is it because you can't?" Whitmore demanded hotly, "or because you won't?"

"Both. I cannot give you what my husband holds, and always will. I choose to keep my memories untarnished. You forget that I am a Chinese woman by right of mar-

riage. A Chinese widow does not marry again," she told him gravely and proudly. "Not women who are respected and who respect themselves. I do not often speak of my marriage, not because I forget it, but because I remember it so well. It was perfect. To me, Lord Whitmore, a second marriage would be bigamy. To me Mr. Sên is *not* dead. I am as much, as completely and as consciously his wife to-day as I was when I lived at his side. My husband has not left me. I shall not leave him."

And Whitmore realized that that was final.

He accepted defeat gallantly.

"I will not trouble you again," he promised quietly.

The brown fingers gave the white ones a friendly little grip.

How enormously she liked him! And she could have cried then for the nice girl who had missed him.

Whitmore chatted easily for a few moments before he got up and gathered himself a tea-rose bud. He threw her a quizzical smile as he drew it into his coat. Then he retrieved his panama and sauntered off cheerfully towards the house.

"Done in!" he said to himself grimly as he went, "done in by a dead Chinaman! My word!"

And Mrs. Sên stayed on in the rose-garden with her man who was with her there among their roses.

## CHAPTER VII

**F**EWER girls create a sensation, when they make their presentation curtsey at Buckingham Palace, than are said to have done so. Too many pretty débutantes follow each other to the Royal footstool for any one of them to be singled out very especially by those who stand watching them.

Miss Sên did not create a sensation at the court of St. James that night, but she was noticed and she thoroughly enjoyed herself through all of the function that so many girls find an ordeal. "I wasn't frightened one single bit—not once," she said gleefully as she drove home with her mother and Ruben, who had joined them as they left the Palace.

Why should she have been—the girl who came of a clan whose women had been court ladies when Britain was a wilderness, whose women had been of rank for thousands of years, and one of whom had been an Empress when Chinese ruled in China, before the Manchu came to its throne!

She carried her birth with her—its composure and sunny ease, its dignity and suavity. Sir Charles, watching her as the girlish figure in girlish gown swept softly across the palace floor and bent before the throne, said to himself as he had a thousand times before, "How birth tells!"—a very trite saying that is the truest of them all.

Ivy Sên did not create a sensation at the Drawing-Room, but she did in the season it opened for her. Society made much of her, perhaps largely for the reason she had given bitterly to Lady Snow. But what the girl had anticipated sorely as a very "bitter pill" she found an exceedingly sweet morsel. Society liked her; she loved it. Ivy scarcely would have exchanged places now with her mother's pathetically plain kitchen maid.

Ivy forgot her grievance, forgot to be unhappy—for a time.

No one slighted her. Men told her that she was lovely, and told her that they found her charming; said it with their eyes, told it because they sought her.

The girl was girlishly happy; and because she was happy, suddenly docile and sweet.

Mrs. Sên was radiant and grateful; her one trouble had passed. Ruben went back greatly relieved to keep his last term at Cambridge.

"Mother," Ivy suggested at breakfast, "let's cut everything out this morning and go off to the Academy early while the rooms are comfortably empty. I'd like to *see* a few of the pictures, wouldn't you? We've been twice, and I haven't seen a thing but other women's hats."

"I have a fitting at eleven, dear; and you know the Besingtons are lunching here—and Caverley."

"Chuck the fitting; it will keep. We'll be back for lunch if we go now. You must come with me; we never have five minutes together now. You can't want any more breakfast, you've had lots. Come along! I'll race you to see who can change quickest and we'll be off before the bores begin to gather."

Mrs. Sên laughed and pushed back her chair obediently. It was nice to go off alone with Ivy for the morning—nicer that Ivy wished it.

"I'll race you up the stairs," the girl offered as they went through the hall, Ivy's arm about her mother's waist.

"Race yourself—if you feel like it in a habit after an hour's ride. I decline to run up two flights of stairs. How did Polyanne behave?"

"Like a vixen, but I took it out of her—had a scrumptious ride."

Ivy scurried up the stairs to change her habit. Mrs. Sên followed her happily, a little more slowly.

They had breakfasted really early—as they often did even in the whirl of Ivy's first season, Ivy daintily ravenous after her earlier ride. Burlington House was comfortably uncrowded when they wormed their way through the turnstile.

They both liked pictures, of course. Who doesn't? But neither mother nor daughter knew much about them. But one must have a look at the Academy, at least the Picture of the Year and the portraits. Mrs. Sên made it a rule to read up the Academy of the year in the *Morning Post*, and to

know what to look at, and what to think of them when she did, before she went. But she really hadn't had time to do it this year—what with her clothes and Ivy's, choosing and fittings, a perfect jungle of engagements to keep, invitations to answer and send, and all the rest of the fashionable technique of Ivy's first season. She did not even know which was *the* picture this year or who had painted it.

But here they were, Ivy glad to have had her way about coming, Mrs. Sên glad because they were together, and they did their duty, slowly and cheerfully and carefully, giving at least a glance to every picture, even marking their catalogues now and then, a good, useful precaution for future table talk. They did their duty by Rooms I, II, and III.

"Most enough for one day?" the girl suggested.

"Darling, we must see Maud Towner's miniature! She'll never forgive us if we don't."

"Run along and look at it then, you poor dear conscientious mother. I'll wait here nice and comfy on this torture of a red bench until you come back, and then we'll go home, don't you think? You can tell me what Lady Towner's miniature has on, if it has anything, and how its hair is done, and I'll be able to rave about it to her every bit as well as you."

Mrs. Sên nodded indulgently and plodded off to the Miniature Room.

There were not many here yet though it was nearly noon. It was August; the Academy had run its course. A sprinkling of artists, a few country late-comers were about all here to-day—no one Miss Sên had ever seen before, no one that interested her now.

But she noticed a thin crowd gather once or twice at a canvas across the room and linger there a little.

"Think of painting *her*!" she heard a girl say indignantly to another as they turned out of the small group about the picture.



"No accounting for tastes!" the other stranger replied with a shrug.

So it was some woman's portrait. Was she notoriously *déclassée*, or only plain, Ivy wondered idly.

She got up and went to have a look for herself, less because she was curious than because she was far from "comfy" on the settee which she herself had called not too unkindly a "torture."

Two men—more of her own class than any one she had noticed here this morning before—turned away from the canvas as she reached it. They both were grinning.

"Devilish pretty Chink, I call her," the younger man said, and they both laughed.

Ivy stiffened, gave them a cold little haughty stare, and passed them to the picture.

Ivy Sên flushed an angry crimson as she saw a very beautiful picture—a full-length figure of a gorgeously robed, richly jeweled Chinese woman; a woman with tiny deformed feet and embroidered trousers. She was wearing elaborate nail protectors, but one long-nailed finger was uncovered, a jeweled protector lying beside a long silver-pipe, a queer little musical instrument of some sort, and a squat little earthenware god on a table of shiny black wood. The sumptuous figure was not belittled by an overemphasized background, but the pictorial temptation of still-life accessories had been beyond the painter's full resistance. A great embroidered curtain swept behind the girl—a great sprawling dragon of green and bronze on the sunflower yellow folds, and through an open window at the canvas' edge a distant pagoda was glimpsed.

Did she look as heathen-Chinee as that, in spite of the soft gray Paris frock and the girlish Bond Street hat? More Chinese perhaps because of the attempted disguise of her English clothes?

Had that man with the ruddy hair meant the girl in the picture was a pretty Chink, or that *she* was? They had been coming towards her as he spoke, and not three feet away. If he had meant her, he had not had even the courage of his insufferable impudence; for the puppy had flushed a sheepish pink when he met her eyes and saw that she had overheard. She had not noticed the other man, but they both had laughed.

Mrs. Sên coming back was startled at Ivy's stiffened pose and the chill angry misery on the girl's face. Ivy stood with her back to the picture, but near it, as if defying any one to overlook her who looked at it. She stood very still—with a small bitter sneer on her small red mouth.

The winter of Ivy Sên's discontent had come again.

The mother saw that it had, and saw why.

They appeared—the girl on the canvas and the girl in the flesh—as China Smiling in Sunshine and China Frozen in Shadow.

Ruby Sên's mother-heart stood still for a moment. Then she smiled and said gaily, "Here I am, dear."

"I think that we are the picture of the year," Ivy said clearly—others beside Mrs. Sên must have heard her—with a queer little gesture towards the "A Chinese Lady."

Then without another word Ivy led their way out of the rooms, down the stairs, across the entrance hall out on to the porch, down again and across the quadrangle. The girl walked proudly, and her narrow slant-set black eyes were sultry and bitter, hard with pain and defiance: China in Storm.

Under the Piccadilly Archway Mrs. Sên stopped abruptly and held out her hand to one of two men who were lighting their cigarettes there.

"Why, Roland! It is you, isn't it?"

The ruddy-haired man of Ivy Sên's discomfiture said, with

his foot on the cigarette he had flung down, hat, gloves and stick dexterously clutched in his left hand, that it certainly was.

"It's Roland Curtis, Ivy; Cousin Lillian's youngest boy," Mrs. Sên explained.

Curtis went red, and dropped his gloves. But Ivy Sên smiled sweetly and held out a cousinly hand.

"I saw you admiring my portrait in there just now, Cousin Roland," Ivy said, innocently.

Roland Curtis mumbled something—no one understood what; he least of all.

Ivy laughed—a pretty, friendly laugh of sheer amusement. And Mrs. Sên and the man who had picked up the glove Curtis had dropped both saw that the girl gave Roland's hand a tiny friendly squeeze before she dropped it.

Mrs. Sên smothered a sigh. Ivy was up to mischief! She knew Ivy so well, and the quick-witted woman instantly had reconstructed the small incident that she had not seen in Room IV.

"Your friend?" the woman said with a glance that said, "You may introduce him, Roland," and, of course, had to be obeyed.

Roland Curtis's only wish was to disappear quickly and permanently; he gave the introduction reluctantly and awkwardly.

"Oh—don't you know Tommy Gaylor?"

"No, we never have met but I knew his father and mother very well indeed when I was in Madrid years ago. You must be Sir William's son, Mr. Gaylor, for you might be he. Won't you come with Roland to see me and tell me all about your people? In Delhi now, aren't they?"

Gaylor said that they were, and said how glad he'd be to call if he might—and meant it.

"You'll come soon, won't you, Roland?"

Roland promised that he would, and vowed to himself that he would not—soon or ever.

“Why don’t you bring them home to lunch with us now?” Miss Sên suggested.

Yes; Ivy was going to make trouble! Mrs. Sên knew it, and Tom Gaylor suspected it.

“Sorry—awfully sorry,” Curtis hastily refused the invitation that Mrs. Sên had not given, and intended not to give, if she could avoid it gracefully. “Got to catch the one-fifteen at Victoria; Tommy and I are going to—to Frimley to cousins of his for the week-end—the Burton-Hamiltons. I’ll bring him to see you next week though. So jolly glad we ran into us—you, I mean. Can I get you a taxi, or have you got a car waiting? I say, Tom—we’ve cut it rather fine, haven’t we!”

“We are going to walk,” Ivy said before her mother could speak. Mrs. Sên was half afraid Ivy was going to suggest walking toward Victoria. “Can I call you a taxi, Cousin Roland?” the girl ended concernedly.

Curtis was speechless.

Gaylor came to the rescue. “No—thanks awfully, Miss Sên. Can’t afford half a taxi between us to-day. We’ve got to penny bus it.”

She let her new-found cousin escape then—but she made him shake hands with her again.

Mrs. Sên made no comment as she and Ivy went leisurely homeward. She would choose a wiser time.

She wished they had not come to the Academy. She wished she had slipped past Roland Curtis without “seeing” him. That would have been easy and plausible enough; for she had not seen him for years, and had no idea that he was in England.

She hoped that Ivy would be nice to the Bessingtons at lunch.

Ivy did not come down to lunch. Her head was bursting; she'd have to lie down in the dark, she said as they turned in at their gate.

It was true.

## CHAPTER VIII

MRS. SÊN knocked lightly on her girl's door—knocked timidly.

But Ivy called, "Come in, Mother," pleasantly.

A Chinese girl—in China—very much more ill than Ivy Sên, would have rushed to the door, would have opened it for the mother with grateful words and bending gesture of welcome. Ivy did not rise; but she turned her head a little as Mrs. Sên came up to her, and the mother was glad to see that her child's grave eyes were not unkind.

The girl was sitting listlessly at an open window and her head lay wearily against the pillow behind it.

"It is after four, dear. Have you had any tea?" Mrs. Sên knew that Ivy's luncheon tray had been refused at the door.

"I don't want any."

"I thought perhaps you'd let me have mine here with you. Don't you think you could drink a cup, if I made it? Is your head no better?"

"Oh, yes—lots better. I've cried the stuffing out of it. Ring, if you like. I'll drink two cups of tea, if it will please you, Mother." The girl's voice was a trifle tremulous, and utterly weary.

Mrs. Sên's heart ached for Ivy; Ivy's heart ached for her mother. Both presaged the talk that was coming, Ivy more clearly but less painfully than the woman did. They both knew that the talk had to come. Mrs. Sên had known that for a long time now. Ivy had intended that it never should



come. What was the use? It would change nothing. What was, was. To thrash it out together would accomplish nothing but pain to her mother. But suddenly the girl knew that it had to come, and had to come now. They must talk it out this once or she would go mad, she thought.

When she had rung Mrs. Sên drew a chair to Ivy's, and except to give the order, when Ivy's maid came, they did not speak again until the tea things came. Mrs. Sên sat with a hand on the girl's knee, and presently Ivy slipped her hand over her mother's, and left it so until Mrs. Sên moved to busy herself at the little tea table.

Ivy kept her word. She always did. She drank two cups of tea and ate a little fruit.

"I ought to like tea, oughtn't I?" she exclaimed ruefully as Parker took the tray away. "How I hate it!"

"Why not always have coffee, then?" Mrs. Sên spoke lightly, spoke very gently. But she paled a little. She knew what Ivy meant—knew why Ivy disliked tea. And she knew that it was coming now, the painful open disclosure of what had been so long and so bitterly pent up between them. Ruby Sên knew that she stood at the bar of justice and that the child she had borne was her accuser and her judge.

Ruby Sên had never been a coward. She came near to it now.

A culprit mother arraigned by her own child; judged and pre-condemned by the child she loves! There can be little in life harder than that.

But Mrs. Sên met it quietly, with nothing but love and motherliness on her placid face.

Ivy Sên hated herself for saying it, hated to say it. But she had to. It was coming out now, because it was stronger than she; because it had been pent up too long. It was all coming out now. It was bursting out now—bursting into wretched, futile hopeless battle. Even as she spoke she tried



not to—"All Chinese like tea, don't they, Mother? All but me."

"Most of them do, I think, dear."

Ivy knotted her tiny hands together tightly, and brooded down at them.

Mrs. Sên longed to lay her hand on Ivy; but the mother did not dare touch her daughter.

"We are going to a dance to-night, aren't we?" Ivy asked wearily.

"Two—unless you'd rather stay at home—to the Graingers and then on to the Hillyards."

"Do you care to take me? Do you like to take me about with you?"

"I love to, Ivy," Mrs. Sên said gently.

"I should think you'd hate to! I wouldn't do it, if I were you!"

"Your eyes are a little red, dear; but they won't be when you have bathed them," Mrs. Sên replied weakly.

Ivy laughed miserably. "I wasn't thinking of my eyes. Because of my face, I mean."

Mrs. Sên had known that, and she knew that Ivy had known that she did.

It had come now—the terror was on them; Mrs. Sên faced it squarely, praying as she did that she might find some word to soothe Ivy's sore.

"Ivy, do you feel so badly about it? Can't you conquer it, dear? It isn't anything really. It's just a prejudice."

"It may not be anything but it spoils everything for me," the girl answered with slow, quiet passion, very sad to hear in her young voice, terribly sad for a mother to hear. "It spoils my life utterly. I loathe myself. It may be nothing, but to me it is a hideous disgrace. I'd kill myself if I had the pluck. I think I may some day. Oh, I know how brutal

it is of me to say all this to you. I know how good you are to me and how patient. But it has brutalized me, the shame and misery of it. Oh, Mother, I wish I had never been born! How I wish I had never been born!" The sincerity of the miserable, dragging voice was unmistakable. The very quiet with which the girl spoke was intense tragedy, unhappiness too great, too deep-seated, for vehemence.

Ruby Sên longed to cry out in her pain; she would have given her life to help her girl and she knew that she was helpless. One small thing only there was that she could do: she could let Ivy say it all; give the relief of open confession, each word of it a stab in the heart of the mother that listened.

"Ivy, darling, do you think you'd feel it less in China? Shall we go to China, and live there—you and I?"

"China!" The venom in the girl's voice was sickening; her voice cracked with her loathing of the word she spoke—the name of her father's country. "Never! I'd throw myself into fire before I'd do that, before I would even see the place. I'd rather be a pariah here as I am—oh! yes I am, Mother—than even see the place for a day."

Mrs. Sên covered her shivering face with her hands.

Even in her own pain, Ivy Sên pitied the mother she was mauling; tried to stop; and could not.

"Why did you do it, Mother? *Why* did you do it?"

"Because I loved him very dearly, Ivy," the mother said gently, but proudly too; and as Sên King-lo never had failed her while he lived, her memory of him did not fail her now, but came to her aid, braced and supported her. She was looking at Ivy now, tenderly and pityingly but calmly. "I married your father because I loved him, and because he was the finest man I had ever known. Your father was the noblest human creature I ever have known, Ivy."

"A noble Chink!" the girl hissed the offensive word.

But Sên King-lo's widow was patient still. "That ridiculous street word cannot touch him, little girl," she said softly. "No one who knew him ever doubted that he was a noble man."

"Thank God, I can't remember him!"

"Ivy!"

"I mean it, Mother. I hate him, I loathe the thought of him, with a yellow, monkey face like mine."

Ruby Sên's eyes flashed fire. And she rose from her seat, the accuser now, no longer the culprit.

"Hush! You shall not speak so outrageously of your father in my presence—or in his house. Do you know what I was when he married me—and gave me everything? A nursery governess, living on your Cousin Charles' charity, and on Emma's good-nature—*pretending* to earn my living by teaching Blanche and Dick! Never enough clothes, never pocket money that I dared spend as I chose. Fed at their table, waited on by their servants, warmed at their fires. Your father gave me everything—and he gave me self-respect and happiness. All that you have he gave you, or made me able to give. I was earning one hundred pounds a year in Washington. Ruben has one thousand at Cambridge. He gave you everything, Ivy!"

"Including my face!"

"A very beautiful face, my child. All the Sêns are beautiful. And they are nobles, older than any in Europe. You have no cause to be ashamed of your Chinese blood. You ought to be very proud of it—if you knew what the Chinese are—such families as ours. I made no *mésalliance*, Ivy; but your father did!"

Ivy rose too and stood facing her mother.

"And you never regretted it? Never once?"

"Never once." Ruby Sên believed it was true. She forgot a few days she had spent in China. They had been wiped

out by a man's invincible manliness, a Chinese husband's forbearance and loyalty and lasting charm.

"Do you not regret it now?"

"Ten thousand times no!"

"And you would do it again—knowing what it has cost me? You love me, Mother!"

Mrs. Sên's face changed piteously. "Little girl—little girl, what am I to say to you! Oh, Ivy, I don't know—I can't answer that. For me it was perfect. He made it so. It breaks my heart to see you suffer. I believe that it hurts me more than it does you that you see it as you do. I think that you are wrong, Ivy; but that has nothing to do with it, really. Every human creature has to see things from his own individual angle; and you are not one of the sort that can ever change your viewpoint. But even for you—if I could have the choice—I do not know if I should give up my memories or undo the past. They are so precious, so infinitely sweet."

The girl put her hands closely on her mother's shoulders, and held her so.

They stood so, searching each other's eyes. Ivy's eyes were hard; the mother's slowly filled with tears that did not fall. It was a long, hard moment.

Gently the girl pushed her mother down into a low chair and knelt beside her.

"I cannot understand you, Mother."

"I think you will some day. And I understand you, Ivy."

"Did no one warn you?"

"Every one."

"But you took your way!"

"I took my way—as probably you will take yours some day."

"You were in China with him, lived there for nearly a year once before I was born, didn't you?"

"For some months."

"Did you like it, Mother? Were you happy there? Did you like China—like being the wife of a Chinese *there*?"

Slow red smirched Mrs. Sên's pallor, but she gave no other sign and she did not evade Ivy's question. "After we left Hong Kong—not altogether. It was all very strange to me up in Ho-nan, in the country, and I was young and callow, and very selfish then."

"You met his people?"

"We stayed with them."

"Oh! And they were horrible?"

"They were extremely kind to me, Ivy. Their ways, their dress, all that was very strange to me; but they were charming, refined people. The old home was very beautiful, a larger estate than you have ever seen. My memories of all the Sêns are tender. And I often think of that old home—stead, and wish that I had realized then, as I do now, how wonderful and lovely it was. It is the most sumptuous place I have ever seen. Compared to it our little place in Surrey is a village cottage with a patch of ill-kept garden in front of it and a dustbin at the back door. And your father's people were the kindest, the most considerate I have ever met—very great aristocrats."

Ivy shuddered.

Ruby Sên waited miserably for Ivy to go on, for she herself could find nothing to say that she felt would help at all.

They stayed silent for several long unhappy moments before Ivy spoke.

Then, trying not to say the words that blurted out—"Do you know why I do not like to come into your own rooms?"

"I'm afraid I do." Mrs. Sên spoke gently, but the quiet words writhed through ashen lips.

"Because there is a picture of him in each of them! Oh, Mother, Mother, how could you? You—an English girl!

And it was not for his money! I know that. It would not have hurt me quite so much, if it had been!"

"His money had nothing at all to do with it."

"Oh! how I hate him! I hate him—I loathe him!"

"Ivy!" the mother sobbed.

Ivy broke into bitter, passionate weeping, huddled on the floor, her face buried on her mother's knee. Mrs. Sên was crying too; their grieving shook them both. Ivy's sobs were hardest, but perhaps the mother's were the bitterer.

"I am a beast to hurt you! But I can't help it, I can't help it!" the girl sobbed.

"I don't want you to help it, dear."

Ivy sat up suddenly with her elbows on the other's knees—searching her mother's face again after she had dragged her loose sleeve across her eyes. "Do you suppose any Englishman—any nice Englishman—will ever wish to marry me?"

"Many." Ruby Sên smiled down at her girl tenderly.

"I don't! But I have lots of money—or will have—that you can't keep from me. Some adventurer will, perhaps. I shall marry the first man that asks me to—if he is English."

"Ivy! My little Ivy!"

"I will, Mother!"

"Don't punish me that way, dear."

"You are punishing me!"

"Punishing you, Ivy—now!"

"Yes!—Mother, will you marry Lord Whitmore—for me? *That* would help me—make life so much easier for me."

"I cannot do that. I never will do that, Ivy." Mrs. Sên spoke kindly, but the firmness of her will in that was unmistakable.

Ivy laughed—harder for the mother to hear than the storm of weeping had been. "Then you are going to go on punishing me!" Ivy Sên got up with a shrug, and began to pace the floor, up and down, like the discontented caged thing she



was—caged behind bars she could not break—that nothing ever could break; the cruel bars of distorted, disconsonant race.

“I will do anything that I can for you, Ivy. But even for you I will not marry again, for it could not be marriage; for I am your father’s wife to-day as much as I was the day you were born. All the world is less to me, even you and Ruben, than my memory of him.”

In her hurt and rage Ivy turned to her mother to say—hating to say it—“Ruben hates it as much as I do, only he won’t tell you so. You sacrificed Ruben too.” But she kept the words back; conquered her impulse to be cruel this time; and all her life will be glad that she did.

It is something—a sop to conscience, a tonic to self-respect—to be able to remember that once when we were cruel to one we loved we refrained from giving “the unkindest cut of all.”

Ivy Sên continued her miserable pacing up and down. Her eyes were bad. Her face was hard.

But in the very whirl and surge of her pain she was suffering for her mother.

Mrs. Sên was suffering for her child.

Again the mother waited, while she could.

“Ivy!”

Ivy paused and turned.

Ruby Sên held out her arms; a mother at bay; arraigned, pallid from both their pains—but not resentful; unyielding but meek; experience and love patient with youth.

Ivy hesitated, faltered—then went to the mother, threw herself down at her mother’s knees.

“I wish I had the pluck to kill myself!”

Mrs. Sên made no protest. The only reply she made was the touch of her hand on Ivy’s hair.

“We must dress now, dear,” Ivy said after a moment—a

moment of infinite closeness and union. "We'd better dress before dinner, if we are going on to two places. It's getting late. Lucky we've got two maids, and won't have to share one."

"Do you care to go—to-night?" Mrs. Sên asked.

"Of course! I'm going to be such a good girl now—as long as ever I can. You watch and see what a good time I have to-night. And I am going to look ever so nice—almost as lovely as my beautiful mother." She gave Mrs. Sên a generous hug, then jumped up and pulled her to her feet. "Off you go!" she ordered. "Make tracks and make lovely. Your daughter is going to dazzle two London functions to-night. She is going to be the rage! Parker! Parker! We've got to be quick!" she cried, as she ran into the bedroom, laughing at her mother over her shoulder as she ran.

## CHAPTER IX

THE letter began queerly, Curtis thought, and he believed he had never seen the handwriting before; but you couldn't be too sure of that—so many girls wrote to a fellow; and not all of them waited for you to write first:

"Dear 11th—or is it 10½th?—Cousin Roland"—who the devil? Curtis turned the page hastily. It was signed in full. Ivy Sên had written her name very clearly.

Roland Curtis sank down into the big lounge chair, moistened his lips impatiently, and read.

The signature had surprised him—not pleasantly. The contents of the note perturbed him uncomfortably—What a little cat!

"What's the use of hiding? Mabel Wade was furious that you backed out at the eleventh hour. She had to ask her

father-in-law, whom she hates almost as much as he does her. And, what was worse, I had to go in to dinner with him. I fancy he did not like that any more than I did; he could not have liked it worse. You missed an uncommonly good dinner too. I knew when you said that you were catching a train to Frimley to stay with the Burton-Hamiltons that you were doing no such thing. The Burton-Hamiltons are in Lucerne. Rosemead is shut up. And you do not go to Frimley from Victoria! You know that I heard what you and Mr. Gaylor said inside Burlington House. You thought I cared and that I'd be glad to see nothing more of you. That's nonsense. I can't help my Chinese face, can I—any more than the all-Chinese girl in the picture could help hers? You both had a right to say what you did—and what you thought.

“Mother will feel badly if you don't come to see her. Do. Perhaps you'll like me better than you think. I am English—awfully English. And I want to be friends. Drop in to lunch to-morrow, or the first day you can—won't you? I want you to. Mother doesn't know I am writing—and *she* wasn't in the gallery, you know, until afterwards. She is expecting you to call. *I want you to*. You aren't afraid of me, are you, Cousin?”

“The little yellow cat!” Curtis muttered, with an angry frown.

He read the letter again—to him the most upsetting letter he ever had received.

Then as he put it slowly back into the envelope, “Poor little girl. It's devilish hard on her! 'Spose I'll have to go—once. Hope they're both out. The next time I go to the Academy, I'll know it. Damn Gaylor. Wonder if she's keener on roses or chocolates. My Chinese cousin! Great Scott!”

Roland called, but he put it off for more than a week. He dreaded it more each day and nearly bolted out of the gate after he had knocked.

Mrs. Sên was out; Miss Sên was at home. Worse—she was alone.

Curtis could have slain the man who announced him, and who had not said that Mrs. Sên was not at home. "Damned careless stupid loon," Curtis called it; but the footman was a quick and excellent servant; he merely had obeyed Miss Sên's explicit order.

"Cousin Roland" was horribly embarrassed. He did *not* like Ivy's face, and he was uncommonly soft-hearted. He was sorry for Ivy Sên; and he was very much sorrier for himself. With his type charity usually does begin at home.

Miss Sên met him gaily. She was not embarrassed and she bent herself to amuse and reassure him.

She succeeded measurably.

The drawing-room was dim. The girl, sitting in a shadowed corner, was lighter than he had thought; and she knew how to dress. He liked a woman who did that.

"She talks all right," he confided to Gaylor in the Club billiard-room that night.

And Ivy did, for she fitted her cousinly chatter very neatly to its silent hearer. Her eager questions were flattering and the regrettable Burlington House episode was not mentioned. But in some subtle feminine way the girl contrived to convey to Mr. Curtis that she regarded it as a good joke. She had heard how beautifully he played tennis; Lord Dunn said he was almost as good at billiards. She was a terrible duffer at both—but she rode fairly well. She rode a lot, even here in London—nearly every morning *early*. You had to ride early, if you got it in at all, with all there was to do every single day. *Must* he go? Mother would be so sorry to have missed him. "You *will* come again, won't you?—to see Mother—

and me. I know everybody now, Cousin Roland; but I have not many friends."

"She is a nice little thing," Curtis told himself as he turned into Kensington High Street, "'pon my word she is. My hat! I am sorry for her—poor little thing!"

Roland Curtis was destined to be uncomfortably sorry for himself before the London season had junketed itself to its exhausted close, and had sped to the rest-cure of guns in strenuous Scotland, and Casinos in the effervescent Riviera.

Good-natured, easy-going Curtis felt in cousinly chivalry bound to see something more of his lonely, dark-skinned cousin. He soon discovered that she was very much the fashion. She went everywhere, did everything—because it "pleased Mother"; but it was only her cousin Roland who interested her—it was Roland on whom and on whose judgment she relied. No one had such perfect taste. She never had known any one who danced half so well. It was selfish of her to let him dance with her so often, but she did so love to dance with such a perfect partner, and he was so kind about it. Did he think that her steps were improving? Hang it all, she was a dear little thing—when you got used to her. He couldn't let her down—not when she depended on him so—and was his cousin too—not a first cousin, or a second either—but a *cousin*.

## CHAPTER X

THE curio shop was in one of the narrow heterogeneous streets near the British Museum that run their short length north of Oxford Street and are stopped abruptly by wise old dingy squares and by wide newer streets that they have not the vitality to cross.

It looked like a modest enough curio shop but the pundits



of porcelains and ivories and carved lacquer knew that many a fine thing and none that was spurious might be found at old Kow's; a quiet, hard-working, unassuming man who still wore the garb of old China, still wore a queue, used chopsticks, smoked a long-stemmed, tasseled pipe, paid sixty shillings a pound for his tea at wholesale in Hankow, and believed indeed that "thrift is blessed," and had no doubt at all that it was a Chinese duty to make English shillings "breed as fast as ewes and rams."

The curio shop was distempered a pale, anæmic buff, but its surface was smooth and unbroken, and its plate-glass windows were clean. Shantung silk curtains veiled each window. Right or wrong, Kow Li believed in the advertisement-value of mystery and apparent indifference. "Chinese Curios" in large lettering of black and gold over the door was the only trade announcement Kow's shop made. But, unlike some other advertisements, it was accurately true. Kow Li's wares *were* Chinese. He bought none, sold none, that were not. Manufacturers of imitation "Oriental goods" had ceased long ago to attempt to do business with Mr. Kow Li. And better-class firms knew that it was time wasted to offer Kow Li—no matter how cheaply—anything of Indian, Japanese or Persian make.

There were three places peculiarly dear to Ruben Sên: his mother's room, the Reading Room of the great Library he had left a few minutes ago, and this side street shop with the room above it that he was going to now.

And dearest of all to Mrs. Sên's Saxon-faced boy was a fourth place—that he never had seen. At least to that Mecca of his he had never been. He dreamed and prayed that he might go to it some day. And he often saw it as he had seen it just now—its water-ways and temples, its palaces and pagodas, as he bent fascinated English-blue eyes on a map at reader's desk K.17.



Ruben pushed the shop street-door open, and went in. A bell tinkled musically, and two Chinese quietly busy at ledger and invoices looked up, slipped down from their high stools, and stood facing him respectfully. Neither moved towards him, neither spoke. But when they had bowed, one tried to thrust his hands inside the sleeves of his English coat—he was the older, and he still had an instinct for the old manners of his youth in China.

Neither sought to serve Mr. Sên. There was nothing here that Ruben Sên could buy—for all was his if he would but be pleased to accept it.

The cool of the long shady room was pleasant after the scorch of the narrow smelly street; its shadow was grateful after the fusty outer glare.

Except for the high desk at which Kow Li's clerks had sat at their work, and their stools, the sizable room was not furnished. The ceiling was handsomely papered with red, leathery, embossed Canton paper. The varnished floor was half covered by good Mongol rugs; modern, not-at-all priceless rugs, not too fine for the wear and tear of casual roughshod feet. There was neither lamp nor gas and no electric light bulbs. Kow Li neither sold nor bought after dusk; and if Mr. Mug and Mr. Wat, his clerks, had to work after daylight failed them, they carried ledgers and papers into a room at the back. From floor to ceiling the shop-room was paneled. Kow Li and his clerks knew the trick of sliding back every third panel. Kow's merchandise, wrapped in soft rice paper and many folds of softest cotton and thin silks, was stored behind the apparently immovable wall-panels. The room had several doors but none was visible, though Chinese eyes would have detected the one that was securely barred by what eyes less used would have thought bands of ornamental carving. A crimson lily bloomed in a pebble-filled bowl on the tall writing-desk.

Ruben Sên greeted Wat and Mug. He spoke to them in Mandarin, lingered a moment to sniff the lily-fragrance before he crossed behind the desk and pushed back a panel; it opened directly on to a long flight of thickly carpeted narrow stairs that were broken by three landings; for Kow's house was one of the small street's tall ones—its tallest.

Even uncouth, Bond Street, made-to-order, six-guinea boots could make no sound through the thick pile of Kow Li's stair carpets; and Ruben did not run upstairs. He went up slowly and quietly, as a Chinese does in the house of a friend he respects; moved slowly too as one who likes his journey.

Cramped as its space, this stair and hallway, intensely Chinese, looked, as it was, part of the home of a merchant prince. And there are stairs as narrow and steep, landings and hallways as niggardly of width, in many a Chinese shop and dwelling house in Hong Kong. Luck-flowers grew in luck-bowls and tubs on lacquered window ledges, carved newel posts and on each thickly rugged landing, for Kow Li had no courtyard or garden (which is where luck-flowers should grow) in his Bloomsbury home. He had made him a tiny Chinese courtyard of every landing, with a pot of luck-flowers in tub or bowl, and elfin-small hoary dwarf-trees and a bullfinch or linnet in a gilded bamboo cage. And Sir Charles Snow, when he had first been here and seen, had instantly understood; and Snow had thought it pathetic—a signal of homesickness made by an exiled Ho-nanese caged in a Bloomsbury side street.

An old Chinese rose with a cry of welcome as Ruben Sên opened the door of the room that filled the topmost floor and laid his horn-rimmed spectacles down on the book he had sat reading, before he presumed to greet his dead master's son.

Kow Li was richly but soberly clad in dark blue brocade. His coat was buttoned with delicate peach-blow corals ex-

quisitely carved. His cap of the same blue brocade boasted a fine emerald. His girdle boasted a jeweled pouch from which dangled a green pearl that was real and half the size of a plover's egg. His short, thin white beard was carefully kept. His hair—what was left of it—was “a sable-silver,” his queue began in the sable-silver of his scanty hair, was suddenly a brilliant black, and ended in braided strands of ruby-red silk. He wore one ring, a thin band of silver that his peasant mother had worn. His stockings were very white with beautifully embroidered heels, his blue-brocade padded shoes had red embroidered soles. His petticoat was edged with black embroidered bats. Bats give wealth, luck at cards and keep age virile. Kow's delicate yellow hands were riddled with age, but the sloe-black eyes from which he had in common politeness removed his spectacles were as clear and as bright as a boy's.

The room was the room of a Chinese palace—Kow Li the Ho-nan peasant kept it so for his master's son. For Kow Li the rich curio merchant had been the body-servant of Sên King-lo the father of Ruben; and held himself so still—a faithful servant of the antique world.

The old Chinese, and the fair-faced, fair-haired boy who was half Chinese did not shake hands. They kept to Chinese ways—old Chinese ways—always when together here; the old man who had been a Chinese gentleman's servant, and had followed him around the world in exile, and the Cambridge undergraduate who looked a typical English boy and whose voice was unmistakably English.

They gave each other the gesture of Chinese salutations—Ruben as gravely as Kow Li. Kow Li bowed very low, Ruben bent him as far and as gravely as Kow Li had.

That was too much for the old man's fealty. He had no right to speak until his young master had spoken first, and bade him speak. But Kow Li was a stickler for strict eti-

quette and his outraged sense of fit social behavior broke through his immediate sense of servitude in protesting words.

"It is unlawful, O most glorious one, that the noble Sên, the high head of the illustrious House-of-Sên, should incline his precious person before his leprous worm of a slave."

"Chuck that, Kow," Ruben answered in English—more to tease Kow Li than because he best liked to use his mother's tongue. "You know—or you ought to—that my youth with all my Sênship thrown in, ko'tows in the dust before your august age."

Ruben shook an affectionately impudent forefinger at Kow, and perched himself easily on the cherished writing-table, stacking his hat, his gloves and his silver-handled Malacca cane on the open pages of the rare and valuable book that Kow Li had been reading, tweaked open a table drawer, took from it a silver box and lit a cigarette. Kow Li did not smoke cigarettes but he kept the best that money and an expert knowledge of tobaccos could buy—for Ruben. Ruben Sên's cigarettes and cigars were famous in Cambridge; Kow Li gave them all to him.

Kow's bright old eyes twinkled affectionately but he answered gravely, his yellow palms turned up in an entreaty for pardon for contradiction. "That high rule has an exception, sir; a young noble does not obeise himself to his servant. Life would be intolerable else, no matter how old the servant-one is."

"Well—you're old, aren't you, Kow?"

"This unworthy person was born yesterday," the man answered gravely, still speaking Chinese. He had spoken nothing else. "You, his noble and estimable master, are venerable, a century old."

"Come off it, Kow Li," the boy chuckled, swinging a disrespectful leg back and forth against the costly table. "Draw it milder, old dear."

Kow Li folded his hands in his sleeves meekly as a servant should when his master speaks—but he sighed; Kow Li did not like English slang on the lips of a Sên; he sighed a little, but even his sigh was indulgent, and his bright old eyes were full of affection and pride. Kow Li dreamed great dreams for Sên Ruben the son of Sên King-lo—celestial dreams laid in the land of Han.

The Trinity Hall undergraduate looked about for some mischief to do. He was bubbling with health and young animal spirits—so glad to be here, so keen to tease his dear old Kow Li. He pounced on the big horn-rimmed spectacles, and put them on. They did not fit; Ruben's face was thinner than Kow Li's, the bridge of his nose more boldly molded.

Ruben studied a scroll of minute characters that he pulled unceremoniously from under a folded fan, which he opened and fanned himself with elaborately, elegantly, as he read.

"Can't read a word!" He tossed the spectacles down on his hat. "What do you wear the things for? You can see as well as I can and better too, you old fraud? All right to impress Mug and Wat with downstairs; but why ruin your blessed old eyes with them up here?"

"As my honorable master justly remarks, it becomes this person who employs them to wear scholarship-spectacles before his shopmen-clerks. But I need them, sir, when I read fine grass-characters. The God-of-sight still is gracious to me, and permits my eyes to do their work without a crutch, but when a page is fine and dim of ink these help them, Master."

Ruben continued to smoke, and to fan himself as he did so. He looked about the room, gravely now; a room a little less dear than his mother's own room, but incomparably more beautiful. Ruben Sên, who never had been out of Europe, had two homes; one, and first, at his mother's knee, the other this, where the rumble of buses in Oxford Street came in



from the opened fretworked lattice of the Chinese room. Ruben Sên never forgot his mother; he loved her as English mothers rarely are loved. But here he often forgot that London or Cambridge, England or Europe existed. The half-Chinese boy was in China here; which was what Kow Li, whose ancestors had served Sên masters for a thousand years, had planned and furnished and garnished it for. It was the chiefest object of Kow Li's life, the supreme urge of his toil, that Sên Ruben should be in China.

There was no other room like this in Europe. There were rooms in Mayfair that aped China apishly; but this one room in London—this Bloomsbury room—was China. It was propaganda, too, subtle and masterly, contrived by a servant's burning loyalty; a loyalty not to be understood by men of Western breed; a loyalty as silent and selfless as it was unalterable and unassailable.

Ruben's blue eyes came back at last to the patient yellow face.

"Top hole! The oftener I am here, the more I like it. It's great, Kow; our room! I believe it's the best room on earth!"

Many a mandarin has received his yellow jacket, his button of coral, his double-eyed peacock feather, with less emotion than Kow Li felt at the boy's words—and with not a tithe of the gratitude.

But Kow Li merely smiled deprecatingly, and bowed as he said: "This—my lord, is a poor room indeed in comparison with those in my lord's palace-home in the sacred province of Ho-nan."

"I wonder if I shall ever see that Ho-nan home of mine?" the boy said wistfully.

"The gods are kind," the old Chinese replied significantly. "And I burn much delicate incense to their propitiation." He left it there. The time was not quite ripe to say to Sên



Ruben all that an old-one's heart and head planned; and, too, Kow Li intended the youth should fall in with an old servant's scheme believing it his own.

"I wonder!" Ruben sighed.

"May the unworthy servant presume to ask his illustrious lord a question?"

"Fire ahead! Want to know which gee is going to lick the favorite on Thursday? Don't I wish I knew!"

Kow Li's deprecating outheld palms were denial. "Nay, great-one, I have no wish to make the horse-bet. That is riding a tiger indeed! But, oddly, the question I importune my lord to condescend to answer does concern itself with the horse animal. Could you use another mount, sir? It is a very beautiful horse animal. I have not seen a better."

"And you know as much about horses as you do about porcelains and paintings, don't you, Kow?"

The old Chinese bent almost to the floor. "Next to his own, my lord your father trusted my judgment of horse animals, illustrious-one," the man said meekly, but his voice creamed with pride.

"He trusted you in all things, I think," Ruben said gravely, speaking again in Chinese.

Kow Li bowed again very low; but he made no other reply. Sên King-lo had neither trusted Kow's judgment, nor invited Kow's advice, concerning marriage with a girl of the West.

"He rode well, you say!"

"My lord!" The two whispered words were a pæon of praise. They acclaimed Sên King-lo the greatest rider who ever had ridden; a *slight* exaggeration, that to Kow Li was none.

"Tell me about it, Kow." And Ruben Sên sat very quiet while old Kow Li told him, as he had again and again, of the horsemanship of Sên King-lo. Ruben Sên never tired of hearing about the father whom he did not remember; and

never Kow Li tired of telling of the master he would never forget. Kow Li knew no happiness so great as speaking of Sên King-lo to Sên King-lo's son whom he lived to serve.

Mrs. Sên knew, and Sir Charles Snow knew, how eager Ruben always was to hear of his father, and they never wearied of gratifying him. But it was only old Kow Li who understood how persistently Ruben Sên's soul called to his father's.

## CHAPTER XI

WHEN Ruben refused the gift of the most beautiful horse animal—there never was question or thought of payment between Ruben and Kow Li; there could not be—the disappointment on the old man's face was ridiculous—perhaps; Ruben thought it pathetic. Ivy would have thought it an impertinence. But Ivy did not like Kow Li and she had not seen him for years. Even Mrs. Sên would have thought it far-fetched. But Ruben Sên was in tune with Chinese emotion.

What the dickens he'd do with another horse he couldn't think, and he hadn't a horse he could part with without a wrench. But old Kow wasn't going to be balked of the pleasure of giving him twenty horses if he wished.

Ruben thanked his stars it was only one.

"Wait a bit, though. I *would* like to have the mare, Kow; she sounds a beauty." Kow Li's eyes sparkled. "I tell you what we'll do. Ivy has a hankering for White Queen and the Queen and I don't quite hit it off as well as we did." White Queen had not come to him a gift from Kow. "Yes; I'll let Ivy have Queen, that's what I'll do; for I simply must have the new mare. What's her name, Kow? Where is she? When can I see her?"

The old Chinese's face beamed with gratitude.

"Your servant has sent some wine, my lord," Kow said presently. "It is excellent wine, my lord."

"I bet it is!" Ruben Sên's wine was as admired at Cambridge, as his tobaccos were, though less lavishly used.

"The cases," Kow advised, "are marked 'one,' 'two,' and 'three.' The wines all are excellent. But may your servant venture to suggest that the cases marked 'one' and 'two' are suitable for you and your most valued friends? He hopes that the wine in the cases marked 'three' should be reserved for his lord's own august use."

Ruben slid off the writing table, rushed upon Kow and threw a riotous arm across the blue brocade-clad shoulders.

But Kow Li pulled away with a protesting cry: "My lord—my lord, you must not do that; the noble Sên must not touch his slave."

"Rites and flummery, rubbish! I'll hug you all I like, you dear old reprobate!"

"Reprobate indeed, O most high, but it gnaws his bowels that the hand of the Sên should soil itself on the coat of a servant. I beg you not again, noble Lord Sên."

"I wish the fellows at the Hall could hear you, Kow. They'd raise a hell of a rag."

Kow Li smiled with suave contempt—the contempt of East for West. Kow Li the Ho-nan peasant did not consider it of any concern what any number of English boys raised.

"China!" Ruben Sên said with a laugh as he strolled to the window, but there was more than amusement in the way he said it.

"China!" Kow Li said gravely.

Ruben sat down on the window ledge and mused.

Kow Li waited his master's pleasure and his mood. The old man sat down on a stool lower than the window ledge, lit his pipe, and began to smoke.

Ruben twitched back the window's amber curtain. "London is ugly—this part of London," he said presently.

Kow smiled—a slow, deferential, wise old smile.

The boy studied the Bloomsbury roofs awhile, and listened to the jangle of the Oxford Street traffic. Then he turned his head again; and he sat quite still for minutes and studied the pipe smoker's old wrinkled face, the face of the man whose race had been retainers of Ruben's own for more than a thousand years.

If Kow Li understood the scrutiny, he gave no sign and he certainly felt no resentment.

Presently Ruben smiled, a very beautiful smile that rejoiced the narrow old eyes that watched. Sên King-to had smiled so. A touch of mischief crinkled the edge of Ruben's smile. Then he sighed and his face grew suddenly grave.

"Kow Li?"

"My lord?"

"Can you lend me some money?"

Kow Li's smile was beautiful too. "No, my lord, your servant cannot lend you what is yours. What sum do you command, my lord?"

Ruben sighed again. "A great deal of money," he answered regretfully.

Kow Li beamed.

"A million, Kow?"

"Pounds, English, sir?"

Ruben nodded sadly.

If Kow Li was startled he did not show it and if his old heart stood still for an instant's fraction, it was because one million pounds would almost destroy what he had hoarded for Ruben Sên. But he answered instantly.

"In a week, my lord—unless it inconveniences you to wait so long."

"I need part of it *now*, Kow. How much now?"

Kow Li made a quick calculation. He looked at the sky. Of course, it was long past banking hours. His heart was beating rapidly. Never before had Ruben made such a request of him, never before heaped such honor upon him. And he must not fail Sên Ruben the son of Sên King-lo.

"Not quite two thousand now, my lord; seventy thousand to-morrow by the Hour of the Horse; all in a week."

Ruben's face rippled. "Now or never, Kow. A week's no good. To-morrow at eleven's no good; I require half a crown now, and by the way that's all I do require at all, you wicked old spendthrift. So, dig me out two and six, and if you don't fork it out, it's all the way home I'll have to walk."

It was pitiful to see; the way the old man's face fell.

Ruben Sên could have thrashed himself. Never again, he vowed, would he tease dear old Kow Li, the truest, best friend a chap ever had.

Kow Li was bitterly disappointed. There was no doubt about that. But he was not going to spoil Ruben's fun though Ruben had spoiled his; the plucky old boy smiled gaily, if a trifle shakily.

"You are merry, my lord!" It was not a quotation on the lips of Kow Li. He read and knew his own poets, not ours.

But he was not going to relinquish quite so easily the great treat, the exquisite privilege, that wicked Ruben had dangled so close under his nose.

"Is there no little debt, no desirable expenditure to be arranged at the Cambridge forest of pencils, my lord?" The old eyes pleaded wistful as a dog's, the old voice was eager.

"Sorry, old friend"—and Ruben was—"but there isn't one. My allowance beats me every time. My mother tells me to spend it all, enjoy it all; Sir Charles has never advised me not to; I suppose he thinks that because I'll have so much to handle by and by, I'd better practice it a bit now; but, hang it all, a fellow can't remember to spend *all* the time—



at least I can't—there are so many more interesting things to do. And money isn't interesting, Kow Li."

"Your years may find it so, my lord. It is a useful servant, sir; a good watch dog, a universal passport, a very great weapon. Those who have just enough, or a little less than that, can find intense interest and mental development in its management. It is an exquisite game—playing money, my lord. It will be denied you, I fear; because you have so much. The masters of such enormous fortunes either grow indifferent to their ledgers, or depute their care to hirelings, and become the serf of their own abundance, unless they regard it in trust."

Kow Li did not add—"as I do mine for you"—but his old eyes said it, though it needed no saying. Ruben Sên knew it and accepted it affectionately, incapable of the churlishness it would have been to deprive the faithful old retainer of a warm happiness.

"What am I to hold my wealth in trust for when it comes into my control, Kow Li?"

"For China!" Kow's reply was swift and grave.

"For China," the boy said musingly.

Ruben looked at his watch. "Let us read now, Kow Li. I can stay just an hour longer. I say, don't forget to give me that half crown before I go. It's too jolly hot to walk."

"This inferior person will not forget," Kow said, as he padded off happily to the shelves, at the back of the long room, that were the *Shu Chia*—the "Reverence Books"—of the Chinese home in a Bloomsbury side street. "What will his worm's master read to-day?"

"Bring me Mei Shêng," Ruben commanded. It would have pleased him better to have waited on Kow Li than it did to see that ancient friend of his wait on him; but he knew where the old Sên retainer's better comfort lay. And he had offended and grieved Kow Li enough to-day; offended



by a familiar arm about his shoulder, grieved him sorely by the disappointment his silly hoax of needing a large sum of money had entailed.

Kow brought the precious volume—printed in Peking long before there had been books or side streets in Bloomsbury; printed five centuries before the birth of Caxton, written almost two hundred years before the birth of Christ; and they sat side by side, the fantastically capped old Chinese head and the young blond head bent together over Mei Shêng's living, pulsing pages.

Ruben read aloud. Kow Li corrected, but not often. Sên King-lo's son knew his father's language fairly well; he had not found it hard to learn; he liked its sounds. "Queer Chinese jargon" was music to the ears of Ruben Sên.

Ruben knew that Kow Li loved him, but he did not guess the half that Kow had labored and accomplished to make that love useful to his young master, the only son of Sên King-lo, for whom his ambition was boundless, for whom he dreamed great dreams.

Kow Li had had but little scholarship when he had followed King-lo to Europe. Kow Li scarcely had known Mei Shêng's name then, and scarcely could have read one of Mei Shêng's pages.

While Ruben Sên lay in his cradle Kow Li had taken his own education very seriously in hand. For twenty years now Kow had striven as diligently and carefully to master the Chinese classics as he had to amass fortune; and for the same purpose.

Two hours had gone before Ruben slowly closed the old book.

"That was good!" the boy said.

It had been good. They had read deeply. Ruben had questioned as they went and the old servant's answers and comments must have delighted a Hanlin.

Ruben looked at his watch and laughed. "Too late to dine at home now. Never mind—let us eat, Kow."

Kow Li struck the gong that stood on the table at which they had shared and studied the five-word meter of great Mei Shêng. Ruben knew—and Kow knew that Ruben knew—that the table-gong's note could reach no one outside the room, and that as he lifted the mallet in his hand, Kow Li had pressed a floor button with his toe. You had to avail yourself of Western methods of domestic convenience in Bloomsbury now and then, even in so East-like an interior as this. But in this one room at least Kow Li would not appear to do so. He always hit the table-gong when he surreptitiously pressed the electric button hidden beneath the carpet. And so did Ruben Sên when, sitting here alone, as he often sat, he chanced to wish a servant to come.

They had not long to wait before the food Kow ordered was brought. Quiet speed was one of the house's many invariable rules. Kow Li never hurried; those who served him never dawdled.

But they waited long enough, Sên and his fatherly servant-host, for the younger to ask a question that he often had intended to ask.

"When my mother was in China with my father," Ruben said, "you were not with them, were you, Kow?"

"That one time Sên King-lo left his servant behind him. It was our only separation from Sên King-lo's childhood till he went on-High. I stayed with you, my lord, in the home of the Sir Snow."

"They were in China nearly a year?"

"Nine moons," Kow told him, "from the Pomegranate Moon to the Moon of the Peach."

"My father took her to Ho-nan; to our old home there? Mother met our family?"

Kow Li bowed. "To the Ho-nan home of the Sêns, that

was their home when Marco Polo went to the Court of Kublai. And when the jade-like your mother stayed there in the courtyards of great Sên Ya Tin, Sên King-lo's wife met there all the Sêns that lived then."

"Did my mother like China? Was she happy there?"

"I have heard that she liked it, my noble lord." Kow Li had heard Mrs. Sên say so. He also had heard, from Ho-nan, that she had disliked China extremely. But he did not mention that. "And she was with her lord, my lord."

"They loved each other very dearly, didn't they, Kow?"

"They loved each other very greatly," Kow Li said gravely. Sên King-lo's marriage had cut Kow Li deeply; it had embittered him then; it still did. He did not like Sên Ruben's mother; it was impossible that he should, since but for her, he believed that Sên King-lo would have taken to wife a Chinese bride; Sên Ruben have had a Chinese mother. But to no one had Kow Li ever told his dislike of Ruby Sên. Until his own death Kow Li would keep faith with the dead Sên, his master. Even Ruby Sên did not know that Kow Li disliked her; even Sir Charles Snow, with his quicker understanding of the Chinese mind, did not suspect it. And always he spoke her fair—and more.

But Ruben, half unconsciously, half suspected it. Kow did not often speak to him of his mother. Kow never came to Ashacres unless one of them sent for him. And—unless Kow liked his mother—Ruben believed that his cousin Blanche Blake was the only Western whom Kow Li liked at all. For Ruben Sên always thought of himself and his sister Ivy as Chinese; although again he never had realized that he did. But Kow Li knew, and rejoiced.

"I say, Kow Li," Ruben laughed softly, "I wonder if I will love like that!" He often spoke to this old servant of his father with more downright boyish frankness than he ever did even to his mother.

"You will love, my lord," the old man said gravely. "You are a man."

"I wonder if I'll ever love some girl greatly!" The boy spoke shyly now, but he laughed again softly.

"You will love greatly, Sên Ruben," Kow Li answered proudly. "You are a Sên."

"Wonder which it will be?" Ruben spoke almost to himself.

"My lord?" Kow Li said huskily.

"An English girl—like my mother, or a girl of my father's race?" Ruben explained.

Kow Li made no reply. But under his rich coat his old heart was beating thickly, under his brocade skirt his old knees trembled. Ruben Sên had prodded the raw sore of Kow Li's greatest anxiety.

"My father loved China. You have told me so, and Mother has. Why did they not stay there—make their home in Honan? Was it because Mother did *not* like it?—did not wish to live there?"

Kow Li's face was expressionless.

"Tell me, Kow," the boy persisted.

"My lord, this servant cannot tell what he does not know."

Ruben left it; but he knew that Kow Li did know, and he believed that some day Kow would tell him. He intended that Kow should.

One more question he asked though: "What really killed my father, Kow? He was young when he died. What killed him?"

"The pill-men never knew," Kow Li answered. "And they were eminent pill-men."

But Kow Li knew what had killed Sên King-lo; and he knew that some day he might tell Sên Ruben.

But he would not tell unless he saw it necessary, or until the hour had fully ripened.

Servants came—Kow Li was amply attended and well served—and placed food and drink on a table. They were Chinese servants, clad, as Kow was, in Chinese garments. When the meal was served they withdrew, not to come in again until the pressure of Kow Li's toe, and the beat of a gong they would not hear, bade them bring towels of fine, embroidered napery and basins of boiling water.

Ruben fell upon the bountiful meal with boyish gusto and appetite.

It was food and drink as Chinese as can be served in London. Much Chinese food cannot. It was delicious food, cooked Chinese fashion. They drank from tiny bowls. They ate with chop sticks. And they ate together in a parity of creature replenishment and enjoyment, if not of appetite; Ruben was vastly the hungrier.

The Sên might not touch with his his servant's fingers, not brush Kow Li's costlier brocades with his lounge-suit's tweed. Kow Li must speak to Sên Ruben with words crawling-humble. But they might eat together, dip their fingers in the one dish, wipe their fingers and their food-heated faces on the same steaming hot towel. They might use the same pipe, if they would. They often ate together here.

It was midnight when Ruben—fortified by two half crowns—left Kow Li bowing low at the shop's open front door.

The meal had not lasted so long as that. They had made music—Chinese music on *kin* and *i-pang-lo*, on *pan-kou* and thin lacquered flute, and talked again—of Ho-nan.

Ruben walked home after all—slowly, thinking.

Kow Li went upstairs again, up to the high room—to pray.



## CHAPTER XII

MRS. SÊN, in her prettiest rest gown, lounged happily in her favorite chair, her hand on Ruben's hair.

They were not talking now and had not been for some time. They had had a long, happy, restful day together—Ivy was on the river with the Blakes—and they had thrashed out a good many things together. They often did that, and always frankly and without embarrassment.

But two things of vital importance had not been mentioned between them, though both were thinking of them constantly these last weeks of Ruben's last term at Cambridge, and had been thinking of them especially all day to-day: Ivy's future and Ruben's own.

Most mothers and sons who are lovers and congenial, canvass together the boy's probable future and his choices of future, almost from the lad's earliest school-days. Oddly enough this mother and son never once had. That they had not Ruben had come to feel a barrier between them lately. He did not mean to let any barrier stand between him and his mother. And he thought the time had come to crash through it.

Not that he believed he'd really have to crash with much force. It would crumble at a touch, for surely it was but a thing of film, an accidental, careless reticence, nothing that was meant.

Ruben Sên loved his mother's room as much as Ivy disliked it. His liking of it was fourfold: it was a charming room, and Ruben was susceptible to all such things; it was his mother's room which made it sacred to him and perfumed it; always they were almost sure to be left alone there, and most of his mother's pictures of his father were in this room. That last was not the least of Ruben's liking of his mother's own sitting-room.



The oil portrait that they sat facing never had been hung at Burlington House, but it could not have been rejected there, even if a less distinguished painter's name had signed it. How fine it was merely as a picture neither Ruby nor Ruben knew, but Sên King-lo, her husband, lived on that canvas and for that Ruby Sên loved it. She had never kept even a snap-shot of King-lo that was not "just like" him. Mrs. Sên would tolerate no half-likeness of him of whom she needed none. She always could see King-lo without looking at photograph or canvas; and she wished their children to learn their father's outer seeming as it had been in his lifetime.

Ruben was looking up at Sên's portrait, studying it gravely, as he very often did.

"I wish I were more like him!" the boy said at last. "Don't you, Mother?"

"Yes," the woman answered quickly. But in her heart she knew that she might have felt it a handicap to Ruben if he had had even the unemphasized Chinese look of his father. And she knew that she must have resented any living replica of Sên King-lo. There had been only one Sên King-lo. She felt, as Charles Snow did, that she would not look upon his like again. Nor did she wish to; not even in other flesh that but hinted his, and that in doing so, just possibly might have diverted or blurred even a little her living memory of her husband.

"Was Father no darker than that?" Ruben asked without turning to her, his eager young eyes still clinging to the slightly smiling pictured face of his father.

"No," the mother told him. "The likeness could not be better in any particular, I think. Cousin Charles thinks so too; and so does old Kow Li, for all his contempt for Western artists. I have tried to find a fault in it and I never have found one. I used to make him stand beside it just as he is

standing there; and I could not find even the tiniest improvement to suggest. It is a wonderful picture, Ruben."

"You have no picture of Father in Chinese clothes, have you? Not even a photograph?"

"Oh—no." The quick reply came a shade unsteadily. And Mrs. Sên dreaded what Ruben might ask her next.

"I wish you had," Ruben said. "We ought to have. It's an indignity to his memory, and to us, that we haven't."

Mrs. Sên was thankful that her boy's face was still turned from hers—he still gazing at his father's picture.

"Why haven't we, Mother?" Ruben asked it affectionately. But Ruby Sên felt the question ruthless. And it stung her conscience. She had thought little of it at the time—in China. She was obsessed by her own homesickness for Europe. But she had wondered since if King-lo had known how she had disliked seeing him in Chinese garments.

"Your father never wore anything but English dress here or in America, Ruben, and when we were in China together he did not either, only in Ho-nan. Most Chinese have adopted Western clothes, even in China, now, I think; and, you know, they all wear it here—all but funny old Kow—" the half laugh she broke off with was a little tremulous, a trifle forced.

"I'd give anything for a good picture of my father in his Chinese dress," Ruben replied. "I say, Mater, I wonder how I'd look Chinese dressed!"

Mrs. Sên laughed again, softly. "Rather funny, son, I fancy. You are so very English to look at! Ever so much more English looking than I am!" She did not add how little she would like to see Ruben in Chinese clothes or how the suggestion had startled her. But she knew.

"Yes—worse luck! Did you wear Chinese things too, in Ho-nan, Mother? How did you look in them? Did you look Chinese? How I wish I could have seen you."

"I think I looked rather nice, dear." Mrs. Sên's little

tinkled laugh was natural this time. "I didn't look a mite Chinese though. But they were very comfortable; and they were very beautiful. I grew fond of my Chinese clothes. I felt almost sorry when I left them off." She was glad to be able to add that.

"It's a pity Ivy and I can't change skins and faces, isn't it, Mother? I can't help envying her her Chinese look; and I think she envies me my Saxon appearance pretty badly."

"Yes," Mrs. Sên replied with a sigh, "I know she does." The sigh was not all for Ivy, or for Ivy's discontent. Ruben had startled her. Only once—and very briefly—in China, when she unexpectedly had seen King-lo in Chinese clothes, had it seemed to her at all unnatural that she was the wife of a Chinese husband. But she had been glad when Ruben had proved a very English baby; and even now she had no wish to have a Chinese son; knew that she would have not been proud of it.

All but less than a year of her married life had been spent here in Europe. She had in no way grown Chinese. To many beside herself Sên King-lo had seemed almost English. Only Sir Charles Snow had known how little English, or any sort of Western, Sên ever had been.

A great deal that is English Sên King-lo had made his own, liked and worn it easily, as he had English speech and clothes. And English and Chinese have a great deal in common—the two upper classes a very great deal. But Ruby Sên came of a race less adaptive than Sên's. He had come to her, not she to him.

American women who marry and live in England often grow almost English; sometimes so nearly English that neither their own countrymen nor English strangers discover that they are not. Even English women, far less adaptive, sometimes become surprisingly French or Slavic through such marriage and permanent sojourn. But it is not in any West-

ern woman to become an Eastern—not even the versatile American woman. It would be rash and unobservant to assert, though, that it may not befall her some day—or she accomplish it.

Ruben's next question startled Mrs. Sên even more and she had to meet his eyes when he asked it; for he turned at her knee, where he still sat on the floor, and faced her, looking up at her earnestly.

"You wouldn't like to live in China, would you, Mother?"

"I don't think you would, dear."

"It is my country," he reminded her. But he did not repeat the question she had evaded.

"I feel sometimes that I ought to be there. China needs her sons now."

"They need not all be in China to serve her," Mrs. Sên said quickly. "Your father left China to do her service, and he never slacked in doing it, not even when we lived in Surrey. Kow Li loves China, I am sure. He is a very rich man now, Cousin Charles says. He says that Kow is worth fully a million."

Ruben grinned at that.

"Your father's old servant a millionaire! And I suspect that Kow sends most of his profits to China; but I don't think he ever means to go back there. And more and more Chinese come here to stay each year now. You have some Chinese friends at Cambridge, haven't you, dear?"

"Indeed, I have—and out of it. I make every Chinese friend I can, Mother. I have so wanted to bring some of them home."

"Why haven't you? Do."

"Ivy wouldn't like it."

"That is no reason for depriving you of such a pleasure. Bring them, your friends, home by all means. I shall love to make them welcome."

"Ivy wouldn't. Ivy can be trying; we both know—"

"This is your father's house, Ruben. While I am its mistress no countryman of his will receive any discourtesy in it."

"Ivy can convey a good deal of insult from under the edge of an eyelid. I don't think we'll try it, Mother."

Mrs. Sên nodded wearily. She knew only too well. She knew that better than Ruben did.

"We will find a way," she told him. "I never have wished to keep you from knowing your father's countrymen."

"And mine!" her boy reminded her again. "I know that, dearest." Then, "We won't do anything to worry Ivy just now," he added. "She is having such a ripping time since she was presented. I don't think Ivy will be allowed to remain *Ivy Sên* very long; she's too lovely."

"Oh! Ruben! How I puzzle over that! So much depends upon it for Ivy—more than for most girls even. If that goes wrong with Ivy, it will go very wrong indeed. And I can help her so little, if at all."

That was all they said to each other of Ivy then. It was difficult. It was easier to long to help Ivy Sên than to plan how to do it.

"There's a chap at Trinity," Ruben said after a little, "that has a great case full of ripping pictures of China—photographs he took there before he came over. They have made me homesick for my fatherland. Do you know, Mater, I have been a little homesick for China ever since I was a small boy, I think. I think that I ought to see my own country some day," Ruben persisted gently.

"And you would like to—go there?" Ruby Sên caught her breath a little.

"I want to, more than I have ever wanted anything. Do you mind, Mother?"

"Of course not!" She hoped he had not heard the tremble she had felt in her voice. "When?"



"Soon, Mother. Couldn't I go for a few months soon after I come down?"

"Why not?" Mrs. Sên said brightly. "Of course you shall. But you won't see *much* of China in a few months, Rue. It's a vast place."

"It will be ever so much better than nothing!" the boy said gleefully. "Thank you so much, dear, for letting me go. And it is just one part of China that I most want to see: Ho-nan. I want to see our home. I think that I ought to, and I long to, before we decide what I am going to do with my life, Mother."

"Yes!" his mother agreed through lips that felt stiff. But her boy had said, "before *we* decide." We—the sweetest word a mother can hear from a son, said as Ruben had said it.

"You couldn't come too? You wouldn't leave Ivy just now, I suppose?" Ruben asked wistfully.

"Oh—no, Ruben! I have no fear for you—ever. I do fear for Ivy. I have been thinking constantly, for a long time now, of what life was going to do to our Ivy, and of what you were going to do with your life. Idle rich is no rôle for you!"

"No fear!" was Ruben Sên's sturdy answer. "May we leave what it is to be until I come back from Ho-nan?"

"You will come back? You will come back to me, Ruben?"

Ruben Sên laughed merrily, a laugh that caressed her. "I *must*," he told her with his face between her palms where he had drawn them. "We are together for as long as we both live—you and I. I wouldn't go without you this time, if it were not for Ivy. We'll go home together next time."

Mrs. Sên lifted her eyes to her husband's—in his picture—asking them for something of which Sên King-lo had never failed her, or scanted her: sympathy and help.

But the pictured eyes only smiled at her.



## CHAPTER XIII

“MAY I announce myself?” Sir Charles Snow asked at the door, ajar in the afternoon heat.

Mrs. Sên made no reply to a question that needed none, and Ruben sprang up in welcome.

Out of harness now, Snow still was a busy man, and this was an unusual hour for him to pay even an informal cousinly call. Mrs. Sên wondered what had brought him and Ruben said at once, “Shall I go, Sir? You want to see Mother alone, don’t you?”

“That was my idea,” Snow told him, “but much of what I wish to say to her, I rather thought of saying to you afterwards. I think you’d better stay, Ruben; three heads may prove even better than two; and the little diplomatic matter I have come about is one which I believe you might be able to handle better than any one else.”

“What is it, Charlie? Who wants a new roof now, or a garage built and their rent reduced at the same time? Or have taxes gone up again?”

There was a pause; Sir Charles seemed a little unready to go on.

“Well?” Mrs. Sên prompted him gently.

“Emma has got it into her head that Ivy may be going to drift into an engagement with Roland Curtis. We don’t want that, do we? I thought we might put our heads together, and ease it off—if there is anything in it. Emma has a way of hitting the nail on the head, you know.”

“Roland Curtis! That nincompoop!” Ruben blurted hotly. “Good Lord! She mustn’t do that!”

“I never have known Ivy drift into anything in her life,” Mrs. Sên said more quietly.

"Well—that was just my way of putting it, perhaps," Snow said uncomfortably.

"Ease it off!" Ruben exploded again. "We've jolly well got to knock it on the head; and knock it hard. Not that I believe a word of it! Ivy couldn't! I tell you what we'll do—just in case, don't you know. You tell Lord Whitmore what Cousin Emma thinks, Cousin Charles. Then he can sound Ivy—she will take it from him, and I don't know any one else she would. If he finds that the wind blows that way at all, why then he can tackle Ivy good and hard. If any one on earth can influence Ivy, Whitmore can. *I'll* deal with the young and lovely Roland. I'll break his silly neck if he doesn't listen to reason straight off when I say, 'Go!'"

"Two very admirable suggestions, my boy," Sir Charles told him admiringly. "Break Roland's neck by all means, if you can. I have no objection, if he hasn't. But I rather fancy any little affair of that sort would result in his breaking *your* neck. There is a good deal of beef in Roland Curtis. Ever see him in regimental sports? I have. As for my appealing to Whitmore, Ruben, that would strike me as sound advice, if I had not already tried it out and drawn a blank."

"What!" Ruben cried.

And Mrs. Sên looked at Sir Charles in surprise.

"Had it out with Whitmore two days ago. He didn't see it as I do—and as I gather Ruben cordially does too. He seemed to think that it might be a very good thing for Ivy. He said so, in fact. Whitmore will not meddle in it, and looking at it as he does, he ought not to."

"Listen to me," Mrs. Sên began. "It would be worse than useless for any one to speak to Ivy. If she has made up her mind—and I have been a little afraid of this for some weeks now—if she has made up her mind, nothing will change it. And a word might push her into it."

"That's what Emma says," Snow murmured.

"If the mischief is done," Mrs. Sên went on, "it is done; and nothing will undo it unless Ivy tires of it of her own accord before it is too late. I don't think she would. The reasons that had made her do it would keep her to it."

Neither asked what the mother thought those reasons were.

"I do not want Ivy to marry Roland," Ruby Sên continued. "But like Lord Whitmore, I think better of Roland than you do, Charlie—and," with a wan little smile, "very, very much better than you do, Rue. Can we be sure that Ivy does not know better than we do what would work out best for her? I am not sure. I am desperately troubled about it all, Cousin Charles. You don't know anything against Roland, do you?"

"No," Snow answered promptly. "There is nothing against the fellow—except that there is nothing to him. That's worse!"

"What do you suggest, Sir?" Ruben said.

"Counter attraction," Sir Charles told him. "Emma did," he added honestly.

"Precisely," Mrs. Sên agreed, "that would be the only possible way—if I were convinced that we have the right. But how? I can't order a counter attraction from the Stores, or engage one from Keith Prowse. Counter attractions have to happen. And Ivy's had them, if ever a girl had."

"I don't mean a man," Sir Charles retorted. "I was thinking of a yacht—for one thing. What about a long cruise—pretty well around the world; stopping at all sorts of interesting places, meeting interesting people?"

"Mother—where are you, Mother dear?" Ivy's voice called in the hall, a gay girlish voice. Ruby Sên had not heard that tone in Ivy's voice for a long time.

There was a light patter of running, and Ivy burst into the room, a radiant, smiling girl, a transformed Ivy; not a girl who was pretending to be happy, as Mrs. Sên had seen

so much of late, but a girl who was happy, unaffectedly, girlishly happy.

Ruby Sên's heart stood still. The man's white eyebrows went up a line. Ruben's hand tightened on his mother's sleeve.

They all jumped to the same conclusion.

Ivy stood a moment in the open door, looking from one to the other, smiling at them saucily—but it was a sweet, friendly sauciness.

"How nice! All four of us. I've had a ripping time, Mother. I have had such a day. Such cream-ices! Better than ours, Mother! Blanche lost her hat overboard. And I've had such an escape, Mother!" Ivy giggled half shyly.

"An escape, dear?" her mother asked her.

"You bet I have! I was going to marry the wrong man. Wouldn't that have been awful?"

"It would," Snow asserted grimly.

"Perfectly awful! And I had quite made up my mind to. But I never shall."

The mother was watching her girl anxiously. Mrs. Sên had paled a little as Ivy rattled on.

Ruben spoke. "Do you mean that you have refused Roland Curtis?" he demanded.

"I have not!"

Ruben turned upon her almost roughly. "You have accepted that fool!"

"I have not!" Ivy retorted contemptuously. "*You* ought to be a good judge of fools, Rue; but in this instance you are a peculiarly poor one. Roland is not a fool—and he is a perfect dear. He's my friend, I'd have you remember. You are not to speak of Roland like that ever again in my hearing. I won't have it."

"All right," Ruben promised good-naturedly, "I never will again—if you aren't going to have him. I am quite willing

never to speak of him again as long as I live. I should get over it if I never saw him again either."

Ivy laughed at her brother as good-naturedly as he had answered her. It was not in Ivy Sên to hold rancor to-day.

"Keep calm, little boy," she bade him. "I promise you that I never shall marry Roland!" Two faces cleared at that; but the mother's face almost showed an added anxiety. She read more than the girl had told.

"By the way, Rue, Roland hasn't asked me—and he never will!"

"How do you know?"

Ivy only laughed. She might have said, "Because I shall not let him." But Ivy Sên would not say that. She was not that type of girl.

"My, how late it is!" she exclaimed. "I must dress; so ought you, Mother. We've people dining, you remember."

They heard her laughing still as she ran down the hall—and the mother caught a note of tears.

"Well!" Ruben turned to his mother. "What do you suppose has happened?"

"Counter attraction," Mrs. Sên answered gravely.

"Another man!"

Mrs. Sên nodded—almost sadly.

"Was she serious?" Sir Charles asked.

"Perfectly!" Mrs. Sên told him; her voice was low and strained, and her eyes were troubled.

## CHAPTER XIV

AS Ruben turned out of Bond Street into Piccadilly and down it towards home he had no intention of going into Burlington House. He could not remember that he had ever gone into the Academy except under some com-

pulsion of politeness. He never had enjoyed it; and certainly it was one of the last places he would choose to visit alone. Ruben Sên cared more for pictures than Ivy, or even his mother did, and he knew considerably more about them. But he had no liking for human crowds, except as a picture in the distance. He never altogether liked being one of a crowd. In the joyous young hurly-burly of Cambridge life he liked to be alone sometimes and contrived it. And he disliked seeing more than one picture at a time. To him they hurt and cheapened one another.

He strolled on past the wide Burlington House archway quite indifferently, without turning his head. But suddenly something compelled him—compelled him as actually as a hand stronger than he on his shoulder might have done; and he turned back a few steps and went into Burlington House, amused and puzzled that he did so. But he knew that he had to.

This was funny! And it was a bit of a nuisance too. He wanted to get home and write letters before he changed for lunch. Well—he wouldn't stay here long, that was one thing sure—ten minutes at the longest.

He stayed three hours.

Going from room to room still puzzled and amused, scarcely glancing at the pictures, he came upon a picture that held him.

And Ruben Sên had no wish to escape from the thralldom.

He knew why he had had to come into Burlington House; the boy flushed a little at the knowledge.

He had not bought a catalogue. He went back and got one, and hurried again to his picture.

When he found its number in the catalogue, it told him nothing.

"A Chinese Lady"—he had known that. And he had recognized the famous R.A.'s signature scrawled on the canvas.



He could find out who she was, of course—and easily enough.

But he wanted to know now.

He was going to know that girl. His countrywoman—and dressed as a Chinese girl should be!

She was even lovelier than Ivy!

Ruben Sên was wrong there. But he was not the first brother to make that mistake and he won't be the last.

And how much lovelier Ivy would look if she dressed like that!

Ruben Sên was right there.

At first Ruben thought that all his delight was in seeing a Chinese girl of his own caste clad in the lovely garments of Chinese wealth.

Then—something throbbing in his veins told him that it was more than that.

Perhaps she was in London even now—or had the English artist been in China, and painted her there?

It didn't matter. He would find her.

Thank the gods, he was Chinese—and a Sên. There was no maid in China debarred to him by rank or wealth. Thank God and Sên King-lo!

"I wonder which she'll be—my wife—English or Chinese?" he had said to Kow Li one day. Kow Li's heart had chilled at Ruben's words. Kow Li's heart would have quickened gladly could he have seen his Ruben now—gazing at "A Chinese Lady."

And Ruben knew that the question he had asked, almost idly, in Bloomsbury, was answered.

Sên King-lo's son would give Sên King-lo no Western daughter.

At first when he had come upon the portrait of "A Chinese Lady," and it had caught and held him it had seemed to him that its appeal to him was its Chineseness.

And in large part it had been that at first. There was not a symbol pictured there or hinted—dragon's claw on curtain, arabesque on carpet, pagoda among the pink flowering almond-trees in the distance, but spoke to him in the old language that his father had learned in a Ho-nan courtyard; their message reached him, and he called them "home." And he understood them, for Kow Li had taught him well.

Then, as he sat drinking his fill of it, he knew that it was the girl in the picture that lured and called him: a maid's appeal to a man—personality calling to personality.

Had he thought about it he would have said that he had forgotten China, that there was no China, neither China nor England; only a girl's proud exquisite face; as years ago in a Potomac woodland another Sên had known neither China nor Virginia but only love for Ruben's mother.

But Ruben Sên had not forgotten China—the homeland he had never seen.

It was both that called and held him; the Chinese atmosphere and details of her background, and the girl that embodied them. Both had revealed him to himself.

Oh! he would find her. And when he had, he would greet her without hesitation or compunction, as he would have followed her, reverently, though his pulse pounded madly, if he had chanced to meet her on the street or at a function.

For Ruben Sên believed that he had found his life's meaning and his future.

Boys are like that sometimes.

He was tingling and elated from a new experience as he went briskly home at last; and it did not take him long to plan how to go about the most important thing on earth. Clearly the first thing to do was to make the acquaintance of the R.A. who had painted the portrait of a Chinese lady. That would not be difficult. But he hoped the fellow was in London or somewhere fairly accessible.

## CHAPTER XV

RUBEN SÊN let himself in with his latchkey, threw his hat and gloves on the hall table, and strolled to the little morning-room which usually was his downstairs "den" when he was at home in Kensington, and stood aghast in its door.

Roland Curtis was smoking in the biggest lounge chair.

"Hello!" Curtis remarked.

"Hello!" Ruben replied.

"Been waiting for you since two. Billings said you'd be home to lunch."

"Told him I would. Sorry. Hope they gave you some." Ruben felt far more kindly towards Curtis now that the danger of having him for a brother-in-law was over.

Curtis nodded. "Looked after me all right. Off to Africa—or somewhere. Wanted a talk with you first."

"I turned into the Academy—hadn't had a squint at the pictures this year. I got interested, and let lunch slide."

"I wish I'd never seen the place," Curtis remarked dejectedly.

"Didn't care for it this year?"

"The Academy? Never care for it; don't know why the devil I let Tom Gaylor drag me in there. I got into plenty of trouble going there this time. Shan't go again—you watch it."

"Ran into your biggest creditor, or ran your walking stick through a thousand guinea canvas?" Ruben inquired sympathetically. He was not interested in what evil had befallen Curtis at Burlington House; but the other seemed in need of conversational assistance. Sir Charles had spoken respectfully of Roland as an athlete, but Roland did not look athletic at the moment; he looked limp and worried.

"Haven't got a creditor. Can't afford 'em. Can't poke sticks through the pictures; take 'em away from you at the door," Curtis retorted, nothing if not literal.

"Oh—so they do," Sên admitted apologetically.

"It was worse than that. Creditors and accidental damages can be squared with £ s. d. Some things can't. This can't."

"What can't?" Ruben lit a cigarette and seated himself. He didn't see Curtis getting to the point very quickly, or dealing with it briefly when he did get to it.

"Me. I can't. The way I'm feeling about it, and am going to go on feeling about it—don't you know."

"Feeling about what?"

"Ivy. Supposed you knew. She won't have me."

So Curtis *had* proposed to Ivy, and, of all places, at Burlington House!

"Shan't even ask her," Roland continued. "Got the sack, and know it. Not going to bother Ivy any—too fond of her. She showed me where I got off. I got off. My word—I wish I'd never seen the bally Academy. Catch me going there again! Not if the Queen tried to take me. I'll watch it. What! The King and the Archbishop of Canterbury couldn't get me there again."

Sên smiled. He did not picture Her Majesty leading Roland by the hand through the rooms of Burlington House, still less the Sovereign himself dragging the reluctant and protesting Curtis through those picture-hung galleries. And he had never heard a suggestion more irresistibly funny than Roland Curtis and the Archbishop of Canterbury arm in arm.

"If I hadn't been a soft sheep and let Tommie Gaylor drag me in there that day I might never have seen Ivy. If I hadn't seen her, it wouldn't have happened, would it! We met there—the three of us, and your mother introduced us. And my fat was jolly well in the fire soon after, I can tell you, don't

you know. Ivy didn't like me, and she was mad enough at Gaylor to eat him. It was awkward. I lit off as soon as I could. Promised your mater I'd call. Didn't mean to do it. Hadn't fallen in love with Ivy then; too jolly awkward what had happened inside—I had put my foot in it, I can tell you—about a picture, and so had Gaylor."

Ruben had no idea of what Curtis was babbling, except that he first had met Ivy at the Academy; neither had he any curiosity; and the last thing he wished to do was to side-track his troubled visitor into a recital of details that would still more prolong a stay which promised not to be brief at best.

Mr. Curtis babbled on. "Had to say I'd be delighted to call. Didn't have to mean it. Wild horses weren't going to make me do it either. But Ivy wrote me a note. Got it yet. Had to call then. Didn't want to—scared stiff, don't you know. Went. Had to. My word—I didn't stay away much after that. Lord! Less'n a week I was head over heels. Thought she liked me too. No end nice to me. I walked on air. Smelled roses all the time—smelled orange blossoms too—that's the sort of fool I was! God knows what I didn't run myself into at my tailor's. Lord! And, she'd have had me, 'pon my word I believe she would! It was running along lovely until last Friday!"

Ruben looked up, suddenly interested. It was last Friday that their mother had insisted that Ivy's cryptic announcement could mean but one thing—a very vital thing; that Ivy had met some other man who had attracted her strongly.

"We were on the river last Friday—your cousins the Blakes, Ivy, me, two or three others. Ran into Gaylor on an island. We landed. He was mooning about there all by his lonesome. Punted out all alone. Funny thing for a chap to do—I ask you. What's the good of the river without a girl, unless you're racing or training, I ask you. What!

"I thought he'd make tracks. He didn't; he stuck. He joined up. I thought Ivy would freeze him out. Ivy did nothing of the sort. Her eyes flashed when she saw who he was—she remembered him all right. Her eyes flashed—and then she crumpled. Gaylor crumpled too—never saw Tommie Gaylor crumple before. It was a case. I got off the train then and there. No more hope for me than if I'd been—been—a signpost or a tadpole."

Much of that was Greek to Ruben Sên, but what he did understand fitted in with his mother's conclusion on Friday.

"Who is Gaylor?" he questioned.

"A better man than I am. Better in every way. I didn't come here to bleat to you, old boy. Tommie's one of the best. They are both in luck, you can take it from me. But I've got to clear. Can't stand it here just now. Going to try to exchange into one of the Indian regiments—or get a year's leave. That's what I want to see you about. Let's go somewhere together—have a long shoot somewhere. What?"

It was Sên's turn to exclaim, "I'll watch it." He did, silently but most emphatically.

## CHAPTER XVI

IF she were in England it might delay his journeying into China. Most probably she was, since an English artist had painted her for the London Academy. If she were, he would know her before he went "home" to Ho-nan. In the first place it might be more easily accomplished here than there. Western ways, Western freedom for women had transfigured the edge of China, he knew; but he knew, too, that they had not penetrated far beyond the treaty ports. Not all China was transformed yet. And many a Chinese living now in Europe allowed his wife and daughters there with him rather



more than a smattering of European freedom; but would insist that they resume Chinese ways, respect Chinese conventions and privacies, on their return to China. He knew several Chinese girls in London whom he felt sure he would not be able to know so, if he too were in China after their return there.

In the second place he had no mind to wait; to postpone until he came back from China the acquaintance from which he hoped so much. China was an old, old country. China would be there when he went to her, no matter when. Love was young; and so was Ruben. Love and Ruben could not wait.

Sir Hugh Lester was in London. Ruben Sên did not find it hard to meet him.

But there it ended.

Neither Ruben nor any other—Sên enlisted several—could get from Sir Hugh the slightest information concerning the painter's Chinese sitter. That was the adamant condition upon which he had been permitted to exhibit the portrait. He had given his word. And either he could not or would not say when or where he had painted "A Chinese Lady." He would not even state that it was a portrait. He could not be drawn in any way. No—it was not for sale—emphatically no offer would secure it.

Desperate and baffled, Ruben confided to Kow Li what he would rather have kept to himself. Kow failed, as Sên had, to find any Chinese who recognized the lady in the picture.

Ruben Sên had to let it go at that.

He did not mention "A Chinese Lady" or his quest for her to his mother or to Ivy. Time enough to do that when he found her.

He would find her first and then all would come right—it should!—unless she were wed or betrothed, or would have none of him; she or her father.

Ruben Sên went alone to China. He knew how much Kow Li longed to go with him, though Kow never said so. But Ruben chose to go alone, without companion or friend of any sort, since he could not take his mother with him.

He wished to be alone with China at first; presently Kow probably might join him, since Kow so greatly wished it.

But he would start on his pilgrimage alone.

Ivy was furious that he went. She pleaded with him not to go, before she lost her temper and stormed and clamored. But only one, of all the world, could have kept Ruben Sên from China now: his mother, and she would not.

Only she could have held him in Europe now, unless a Chinese girl had come from her canvas and bade him stay!

That did not happen.

Ruben came down from Cambridge for the last time, spent a week in Surrey at their place in Brent-on-Wold with his mother, and then the long insistent dream of his young lifetime crystallized into initial fact on an ocean liner. England faded in the distance; Sên Ruben had begun his long journey home.

At Ashacres Ruby Sên grieved, but found it no great task to keep from Ruben that she was grieving because he was leaving her for so long. For her grief was not bitter, and moreover, her pride rejoiced that he cared to go. It seemed to her a beautiful loyalty to his father whom she always had striven to keep as real to Ruben, as dominant in Ruben's life, as the living father must have been. Ruben had said that he would come back to her; he would come. As for his calling Ho-nan "home" and all that, it was nonsense, of course—sweet and boyish nonsense. That Ruben might wish to discard England for China never entered her head. But, though she scarcely knew it, Mrs. Sên was *not* glad to see Ruben go. Quite aside from the natural wrench of being without him for the first time since his babyhood—Cam-

bridge is not far from London, if you have three cars and a telephone—Ruby Sên regretted Ruben's going, was a little jealous of it, unconsciously a trifle apprehensive.

He had said, "You wouldn't care to live in Ho-nan?" but that was just a boy's idle chatter. Ruben would loathe living in China—because she knew that she should. And he'd know that he would when once he'd been there.

Lady Snow was almost, perhaps quite, as decidedly against it as Ivy was; and Emma Snow never was shy of saying what she thought if she cared to.

"Ruby's a fool to let him," she told Sir Charles, "and you have no business to let her let him."

Snow rarely contradicted his wife. On occasions he could do it flatly.

"Ruben ought to go," he replied. "Ruby would not have held him back, no matter what I had said to her, I hope and think. She has no right to. But I said 'Let him go,' when she spoke to me about it first. He has seen England. He knows what his life here will be if he concludes to throw his lot in with the West. It is only fair—to him, to China, and to King-lo—that he should see his father's country now, and learn what his life there would be if he threw his lot in with the East. I should have suggested it myself, if he had not—and whether I had believed that Ruby would be willing or not."

"Oh—would you! He'll probably come back with a Chinese wife!" Lady Snow snapped.

"The wisest thing he can do—if he must marry at all."

"Charlie!"

"Beyond all manner of doubt. But I hope that Ruben will not marry at all. And when I feel that the right time has come, I intend to tell him why."

"Lot of good it will do!"

"I think it may. Ruben is a Chinese son—very."

"Ruben is the most English thing I ever have known," Lady Snow contradicted. "Even technically Ruben is half English. King-lo was Chinese—all Chinese. A lot of good it did your telling him!"

"You are wrong, dear. Besides, I said my say to King-lo after the mischief was done. He had fallen in love with Ruby, and had given her his promise. I intend to say my say to Ruben before his mischief is done. But not until he has been in China. He shall go there as untrammelled by what I know must hurt him, as he has been all these years in England. That is only fair; and there is time enough. Ignorant as Ruben is of China, of Chinese ways, manners and customs and all that—but, by the way, Ruben knows more about his father's country and countrymen than any of us suspect, unless Kow Li does—but ignorant as he seems, and may be, must be indeed, of the real China, Ruben is essentially Chinese. His methods of thought, his tastes, his ideals are Chinese. He looks English, but he is Chinese."

"All the more reason to keep him out of China! But, mind you, I don't believe it!"

"All the more reason to send him to China. You may not believe that Ruben Sên is a Chinese, but I know it."

"All the more danger—but, I tell you, I won't believe it—of his bringing home a Chinese wife. That would break Ruby's heart. If you want to do that, why, go ahead!"

"Why should it break Ruby's heart? She'd have no right to feel that way about it." Secretly Sir Charles feared that Emma was right there. "She of entirely English blood chose to marry a Chinese. What right has she to expect Ruben not to, who is only half English, and is half Chinese? She preferred King-lo, a Chinese husband, to any other. What right has she to dictate which of his blood-strains Ruben shall choose to strengthen? None."

"She'd feel rotten over it—if Ruben *did*."

"She never regretted her Chinese marriage. And God knows she never had any reason to."

"Rubbish! How do we know what she felt in China? I grant you Ruby was happy with King-lo here. But King-lo was exceptional. And I tell you she has regretted it with every breath she drew ever since Ivy was born. Oh, you needn't look at me like that. Ruby hasn't blabbed it—no fear! She has never said one word to me, not given a look that hinted it. But I know."

"How?"

"She must!"

Sir Charles Snow smiled.

"And if she hasn't, she ought to!"

"You are incorrigible!" Snow laughed.

"I can see Ruben bringing a Chinese girl back with him, and I can see Ruby's face when he does. She'll look nice with two Chinese daughters—Ivy on one arm and Plum Blossom or Perfumed Dragon Fly on the other arm! Poor, poor Ruby! Oh—I could shake you!"

"Do—by all means, if you'd like to. You have, you know, several times and I always enjoy it. But, Ruben will bring no wife home with him, of any sort or description. He will not marry without his mother's permission."

"Rubbish! Won't he! Ruby didn't marry without yours, did she?"

"I do not happen to be Ruby's father."

"Same thing," Lady Snow interjected.

"Not quite. And Ruby was not Chinese. My dear child, if only I could get it through your head that Ruben is Chinese! He is a Chinese son. While he lives he will do nothing that his mother asks him not to."

"And do you think she'll ask him not to marry a Chinese girl if his heart is set upon it? She'd think it disloyal to King-lo, for one thing."



"And so it would be; and it would be damnably unfair to Ruben—unless she asked him not to marry at all. And *that* is what I am going to do and I think that Ruben will yield to me, no matter what it costs him, when he has heard what I have to tell him."

Emma Snow caught her husband's hand in hers. "Charlie," she whispered hoarsely, her eyes wide with fear, "is there insanity in the Sên blood? Tell me! You know that you can trust me."

"Most certainly not," Snow answered emphatically. "There is no taint in the Sên blood—unless ours has tainted it with unhappiness, as in poor Ivy. There is almost no insanity among the Chinese now—almost none among those who have stayed at home, and have given the precious treaty ports a wide berth. In the old days there was no insanity in all China. I believe that no well authenticated case can be proved of insanity in purely Chinese blood before the Yang dynasty in the seventh century, and almost none until recently. I don't know whether that is true of any other race on earth, but I suspect not. Certainly no white race can boast it. Big fact, isn't it? And it might go farther to rid humanity of its greatest scourge if we could find its true significance, learn its secret. Is it something in the predominance of the white corpuscles in our veins, some abnormal susceptibility in our not sun-tanned skins, or—as I incline to believe—is it Nature's indignation and scourging of the jangle of Western life? I tell you, Emma, I believe that if fifty of our best alienists would chuck glands and psychic oddments and falderals for a few years and go and live in China among inner-country Chinese who never have seen a European, scarcely heard of Europe, they might get on the right track at last—learn from China how to stamp out the greater of our two most hideous and menacing diseases; learn



how to stamp it out in a few generations, by learning its prevention. Insanity in its worst forms may or may not be susceptible of cure, but I suspect it is susceptible of prevention; and that is what science and philanthropy ought to be aiming at. Equally true of all disease, no doubt: lock the stable door before the horse is stolen, say I! No—there is nothing against the Sên blood as it was when King-lo came to Washington.”

“Charles, I believe sometimes that you are crazy!” Lady Snow wearied occasionally of her husband’s reiterated pœans of Chinese superiority. She could not accept them.

“I dare say you do,” Sir Charles Snow told her smoothly. “I suspect that most wives think that of most husbands now and then. And it is just possible that some husbands believe it of their wives occasionally.”

“Tell me then,” Lady Snow demanded—she was not going to be side-tracked—“why you are set on Ruben’s not marrying at all? I could understand if you took that stand about Ivy. Her children may look Chinese. That would be a tragedy. But Ruben! With his yellow hair, blue eyes, skin as white as mine—surely Ruben is safe enough!”

“That’s what you think, is it? My dear one, you are sorely ignorant of the unaccountable vagaries of atavism. Ruben’s children are every bit as apt to revert to Chinese type as Ivy’s—more apt, I believe; because Ruben thinks of his father’s people as his, likes to let his thought dwell upon them, picture them; and Ivy thinks only of her mother’s race as hers. She has barred her soul and, as far as she can, her being, against her Chinese ancestry. But to save the sour conflict, that has spoiled poor little Ivy, from belching up again after several generations, as it may—Nature is like that—I would do any earthly thing I could to prevent Ivy from marrying. But there is nothing I can do—nothing

that any one can do. I might hasten Ivy into marriage—the first that offered—but I cannot, in any way, delay it. I will not rasp her to no avail; she is raw enough.”

“Tell me,” his wife repeated, “*why* are you so opposed to Ruben’s ever marrying?”

“Ruby is not to hear it—nor any one.”

Lady Snow nodded. It was promise enough to the man who knew her.

“When he was dying, Sên King-lo charged me to prevent both Ruben and Ivy from ever marrying, if I could. And I promised him.” Emma Snow made no comment. Voluble as she was, she knew when to save her breath. What Charles had promised he would do. And any promise he had made to Sên King-lo was, she knew, doubly sacrosanct.

But her husband’s confidence had startled her, and in her a new and disconcerting thought.

“Do you mean to tell me that King-lo was not happy with Ruby; that he regretted their marriage?”

“He never told me so. He gave Ruby a great love and it never changed or wavered. When Sên King-lo was dying he loved Ruby as deeply and as tenderly as he did the day he married her—more! But all his life with her was a sacrifice. There must be great sacrifice in every such marriage. In theirs it was King-lo who made it. He paid a terrible price for his wife’s happiness. And he paid it gaily—and to the last farthing.”

“What did he sacrifice?” Lady Snow asked gently.

“China; his own inclination, a love of his that was even stronger than his love for Ruby. Have you never wondered what killed King-lo?”

Lady Snow shook her head. She rarely indulged in idle speculations. Why should she have bothered her head over what, as she knew, had completely baffled the doctors? An opinionated woman, whose mind was as shrewd as it was

spectated, there was in no way one of the all too prevalent crowd lay people that set their own conclusions against and above the opinions of scientific experts. Emma knew often enough both with her disinterested, sometimes—but more habitually—eyes with her chief, but never with her daughter or her physician.

"This King is dead of consumption," his Charles said her people. "I feared it before their marriage and I feared other things a thousand times worse, which never came, thank God, and thank his King-fo! Oh, my wife, his King is gone!" Charles' knees ran down peg to the children, or in their mother, the first we owe to his King-fo—we and Ruby. I could no look I could. I often torture myself by trying to think of something I ought to have said to King-fo, and didn't, when they were first engaged. Now, I am sure that I need not. For I am sure that there was nothing and no one who could have influenced his King-fo then, unless his mother had been alive to do so. He would have refused his mother nothing."

## CHAPTER XVII

**R**UEN SÉN had no grief at going. He was so filled with anticipation that it left no room or crevice for regret or sadness.

his Charles knew and Kow Li saw him off; Ivy wouldn't. Mrs. SÉN felt that she could not.

All the morning nothing to know. His heart was singing—all the way to China.

They then stood together on the great boat's deck and "All off for the shore?" had been said twice, Ruén to his English traveling peer, reflection and eager-eyed, Snow trying to look far less green than he felt; Kow Li a brilliant

figure of Oriental splendor, almost broken up by the wrench of parting with his young master, tremulous too with his joy and triumph that at last the Sên was going home to Ho-nan.

Kow Li had made the toilet of his life. No noble of Genghiz Khan's sumptuous court ever went to the throne-room of his liege more richly attired or more noticeably. And this was not the throne-room in the Forbidden City, but the simple British deck of a P. & O. Old Kow Li was a gorgeous medley of rose and crimson satins, thick-padded embroideries, dangling chain and wallet, many sparkling jewels; snow-white embroidered stockings, purple padded shoes with scarlet heels. He carried a small but very costly blue and green umbrella. Its stick of gold lacquer was a radiance, and its open top was a peril both to his own hat, and to all less splendid hats that ventured near him. He wore his "pig-tail" almost lacquered with pigments, and lengthened nearly to his heels with plaited crimson silk. He wore his most scholarly spectacles, and his hat, beggars description. And Kow Li fanned himself incessantly with an exquisite tiny fan; he bowed low when Sir Charles spoke to him; when Sên Ruben deigned to speak to him Kow Li ko'towed profoundly.

Several people tittered as they watched him. Kow Li heard and saw them, but it did not annoy or disconcert him in the least. He knew that they knew no better. And to Kow Li the best of them were foreign-devils, and the rest were nothings.

Sir Charles Snow and Ruben Sên did not titter at Kow Li, or wish to; nor did they smile or suppress a smile.

And they both knew that the odd signs boldly embroidered across the back of his satin jacket from shoulder to shoulder, was the Sên crest of servitude, the *chop* that marked Kow Li the servant and thrall of the great clan of Sên—theirs from birth till death—and after.

As the boat pulled slowly out, Ruben Sên leaning uncovered over the rail, Kow Li broke into uncontrollable sobbing. Sir Charles Snow laid his hand softly on the old Chinese's shaking satin shoulder. Sir Charles Snow was not ashamed of Kow Li.

And Ruben Sên's eyes misted.

No one stood waiting on the Victoria City pier to welcome him to China.

Ruben had wished it so.

They sighted China in the early morning. Ruben had risen with the sun to look for the first thin line that might be China in the distance.

He stood motionless, immovable, hour after hour, until they sighted China. He neither moved nor spoke until the boat was berthed. But he lifted his eyes to the hills of China. That was what the Peak was to him as he lifted his eyes to its blue-misted green; the hills of China; not the homes-park of Western affluence and comfort. This was his portal to all that lay beyond and to him that one lovely hill meant all the mountain ranges of China, all the flowers that grew at their slopes, all the snows that crowned them, the torrents that poured from them, the tiny laughing rills that slid leaping and singing through the hillside verdures down into the valleys and lakes that nestled at the fragrant feet of the encircling mountains. The bund, the buildings thick behind it, all meant a great deal to Ruben because they spoke of the teeming life at this sea-washed edge of his old, old homeland, but it was the feathered crest of the Peak that claimed and welcomed him, claimed him a prodigal son of Han home-come at last, caught him close in a vice of filial love. Trees, flowers and running water Ruben had loved from his babyhood; he had liked to finger the roses in his mother's garden in Brent-on-Wold, had liked to lie for hours on the birch-



shaded grass, watching the clouds drift, lazy as he, across the blue of the sky; watching the birds busied up in the trees, flying securely through the still summer air. But in their Surrey garden, what leapt in him now had been an enjoyment intense but quiescent, almost unconscious, quite inarticulate, a pleasant personal enjoyment, not an emotion. He had liked the flowers and the leafage, the birds in song and in flight, the drip of the fountain, the sky's soft pageant, but he had not thought of Nature. He had laved in her bounty, not bowed down to her. This was his baptism at the font of Nature—a hill-cupped font, green with the lace of the slender bamboos that quivered over the Peak, hiding its pathways, veiling its bungalows, cooling and decking it all. His heart leapt to it devoutly. And it baptized him, a Chinese worshiper of Nature, one with his people, of their unalterable fellowship, in their one true religion—the worship of Nature. And he throbbed at the sacrament and was grateful. It was ecstasy.

No boy entirely, or fundamentally, Western could have felt so, or have been so unashamed that he did feel so.

There are only two peoples who so worship Nature, only two who so find her; the Chinese and their neighbors of the Island Kingdom; and it is with the Chinese that it is predominant and intensest.

He lifted his eyes to the bamboo belaced and lacquered green and gold-gray hillside, and was glad!

Then he went slowly across the deck, down the gangway. And Ruben Sên was in China.

What would he think of China? His mother had wondered, and Lady Snow had, and even Sir Charles a little—though Sir Charles had had but little doubt.

Kow Li had not wondered. Kow Li had known. And when the wireless told him, not an hour later, that Sên Ruben was in China, Kow Li sobbed for joy.



It did not seem strange to Sên as he stepped ashore—neither the place nor its jabbering yellow crowds.

It was a strange and an enormous experience, but there was nothing weird about it; it was a sudden delightful restfulness, uplifting, too big for excitement. Sên Ruben had none of the chilled and baffled feeling, almost a sense of mental apprehension that one so often feels when first reaching a strange city; still more when first stepping on foreign soil.

Ruben stood on the Hong Kong landing stage, waiting for his luggage to find him. He never had been more at ease, never before had felt so entirely, or half so deeply, at home. China had received him.

His was an experience as indescribable as it was enormous. But it is not inexplicable, for it was his by birthright.

But it comes a freer gift—an interracial soul-dole to some—once perhaps in a lifetime. Once (before the Manchu fell) a Western woman standing just where Ruben Sên stood—a woman who had realized no special wish to visit China nor been conscious of any quick interest in the Chinese above other alien peoples—instantly felt at home. She came in after years to believe it a message, and received it gratefully. Places have individuality, mind, soul, character as surely as human creatures do. It is not always our relatives that we like best, are in closest touch with, *know* soonest or surest. And so it is with countries and places. Home and nativity are not always synonyms. Scott's popular dictum beginning, "Breathes there the man with soul so dead," is, one ventures to think, arguable.

Ivy would have writhed at China. China would have bored Emma Snow. Ruben knew that he loved it; knew that he had come home. And he knew that this would have been as true, as instant and direct, if he never had heard of China, or if he had not known in what country he had landed.

Kow Li had labored incessantly, but quite unnecessarily, to make Sên Ruben a Chinese—for a greater craftsman than Kow Li had done it thousands of years before.

Sên made no acquaintances in Hong Kong. He avoided doing so. He did not wish to meet even Chinese, yet; but to be alone with China.

That was friendship and companionship enough.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**R**UBEN spent a week in Hong Kong, and then went slowly to Peking.

Ho-nan was his objective; but he wished to seem less a stranger in the Sên-land than he could hope to seem just yet, and he felt, as both Snow and Kow Li had counseled, that he should see Peking first—the throne-place for so many centuries of all the vast domains of Han.

Peking baptized Ruben Sên with fire.

He knew that to himself he never again would be Ruben Sên but—as he was recorded on the tablets of his race—Sên Ruben.

He would not emphasize it in Europe, for he knew that while she lived he would do nothing that he believed would hurt his mother.

But he had definitely taken his place among his people, his father's people, when he reluctantly passed through the Ch'ien Mên and joyously took his way to Ho-nan.

Much as Peking had hurt him, it had given him his manhood.

He had come to Peking adolescent; he left it full grown, adult, as a Chinese of twenty should be.

He was barely nineteen in England, but here, a Chinese in China, Sên Ruben was twenty, since he had been one year

old at his birth, in the somewhat illogical way that the Chinese count the years of human lifetimes.

He found his patriotism there. It was the Western encroachments and devastations that stung it into life, and ripped from him the European garments that not only his body but his soul, of necessity, had somewhat worn until now.

Sên Ruben discarded Europe in Peking.

He was going back to England presently, to companion and cherish his mother in the environment she preferred. It never would occur to him to evade or delay doing that. But his own life was garnered up in China—now—and he knew that wherever his husk of life might be spent, its core of being would be grappled to China, and that in his mother's drawing-room in Kensington *he* would be in China as truly as he was to-day standing in the lee of the Ch'ien Gate's battlements, on the Wall's broad footway, looking down on garden squares, on the yellow-tiled roofs of the vast Imperial Palaces, and on the hideous encroachment of ugly Western-like buildings huddled assertively up against the Sacred Gate.

Scarcely a self-centered, self-absorbed European, standing on the Peking outer wall, could look down on that storied tapestry of stone, wood and gleaming colored tiles, great patches of liquid green where squares of verdure interspersed houses and temples, quite unmoved; towers, pagodas, gleam of many waters, roofs of many colors; Tartar City, Chinese City, Manchu City, Forbidden City each segregated by its own wall; picturesque rectangles all girdled by Peking's sumptuous, outer Great Wall.

To Ruben it was greatly more than it can ever be to any non-Chinese. It was an epitome of China and all her story. Its beauty enswathed and electrified him; but, too, his very soul was gripped and his pride embittered by old landmarks gone, old monuments torn and desecrated, Western intersements that blotched and disfigured.

The patriotism that Peking engendered in Sên Ruben was a gritty patriotism that quickened with big intention: a more conscious love of country than many of the family-absorbed Chinese consciously felt, or, if they felt it, defined, until the un-Christian stranglehold of Christian peoples, and of a people nearer and less liked, far less scrupulous, cut into them a belated understanding of their entire country's peril and need. China has called her sons about her by the trumpet-call of impertinent, self-seeking internationals. England for one? Of course not. England never "slipped" into Wei-hai-Wei, or forced China to borrow at usurious rates, did she? America for one? No! The streets of San Francisco never ran red with Chinese blood, did they? America has not misdealt with the Chinese in Honolulu and Manila, has she? Japan for one? Certainly not. Japan can do no wrong. Japan is the one perfect flower of Asia; to her own incomparably greater virtues she has added all our smaller virtues—and already betters and outstrips us in every one of them.

A pacific son of a pacific people, Ruben's most urgent thought as he walked on the o'ertowering machicolated walls of old Peking, day after day, was that he longed to *fight* for China—not to fight in one of her own fratricidal wars, but to fight those who had despoiled her, had interrupted and deflected, and had tainted the old flow of her ways. In his heart he could have performed the seven labors of a Chinese Hercules for China. He forgot that he was English. He thought of Sir Charles Snow as a true and valued foreign friend, not as his kinsman, and his mother, never for a moment forgotten, he thought of as the White Rose of China.

He could not fight for China, perhaps. Indeed, for China's sake, he hoped that he could not. She was not ripe for any advantageous or possibly decisive warfare yet. Her loins were not girded; fresh raw sores not healed; wearied, overstrained sinews not rested or strengthened. Her purse-pouch hung flat

at her lean hungry side, her commissariat was not now—or soon to be—on an adequate war-footing. International chess was the hidden warfare for China now; hers to play a waiting game, and a watching, on the World's great gaming board. Well, he could live for China—a greater, longer tribute to pay. He made his vow that he would. It might not be here in China that he could live for China, probably could not be—at least for long years, for not for one moment, in the exquisite birth-pangs of this new quivering patriotism that came as he strolled at sunset on the Great Wall of Peking watching the javelins of gold and green pelt down from the going day-star on to the pink walls of the Forbidden City, did Ruben forget his mother, or his hot boy-soul contemplate that he could—even for China—forsake or displeasure his mother. That was no part of Chinese patriotism. His mother had given him birth; his father's death had made him his mother's guardian, and doubly her vassal. But living with her, sharing her English life, clad again in Bond Street tweeds and broadcloths, he could live for China, serve China, work for China. He would sacrifice environment and outer seeming for his mother if he need and while it was her need, but the seed of his being, the wish of his soul, he need not sacrifice.

## CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Mrs. Sên's letter reached the Sêns in Ho-nan it filled them with consternation. Sên C'hian Fan read it twice and then again before he summoned all the family—more than a hundred of them—to the *T'ien Ching*, read it to them, translating slowly as he read, and bade them council with him.

Should he speed to Hong Kong, greet their white kins-



man as he landed, dissuade him diplomatically, if he could, from journeying on to Ho-nan? Or—there was smallpox in Ho-nan now. Should they intercept their undesired kinsman with news of it at Hong Kong? There was no necessity to state how far from their gates it was that the pox raged, or to call his attention to Ho-nan's area. He was more English than Chinese—his mother's countryman, not his father's. Undoubtedly he was ignorant of China—crassly ignorant of Ho-nan. Should they await his approach, let him come? He might not come, might not find his way even, might change his mind; he might linger at Hong Kong, in Peking, in treaty ports until the months of his stay in Asia all were gone; he might discover in Hong Kong itself the sorry inconvenience of being a white Chinese in China. Kow Li, the peasant who had amassed wealth in England and who sent such lavish tribute back to their temples here, had written that Sên Ruben was very fair, very English. No doubt it was true; and he, Sên C'hian Fan, made little of Kow Li's added statement that at heart and in mind Sên Ruben was Chinese and every inch a Sên, for Kow Li, for all that he had prospered, was a peasant, one of their hut-born "babies," and no doubt his baby-intelligence had been warped and enfeebled by the almost lifetime that the baby-one had lived in England and other heathen countries.

Sên Jo Hiêsen spoke first. "It is not desirable," he began, "that this Englishman who calls himself a Sên should come here. It must be prevented. He can claim his share of all we have. And though the English woman whom Sên King-lo in his folly took for his Number One makes no hint of this in her long, ill-written letter—not one classical allusion in it, scarcely a courtesy, not one respectful obsequiousness—no doubt that is her son-one's object in coming here. What love can he have of his father's people, of our homestead or its temples, he who was born of a white-skinned woman, and



suckled of her Christian milk? He comes to inventory and to claim. Or, if perchance he does not, it is what he will do when he sees how great our possessions are. The English are avaricious. They have found pretext to seize our island of Hong Kong, land, by so-called rental, in a dozen treaty ports and half the fructive wealth of Yangtze valley. They have robbed China of her jades and her lacquers, her bronzes and her precious porcelains. There are silks of Chao Mêng-fu's and of Ma Yuan's, of Chien Shun-Chu's in London; and in a savage place called Chick-cow-go, I am told, a score of our most rare beautiful jades are kept in a case of cheap glass in a public place where heathen, barbarian men and women—men and women linked together by their immodest arms—may look and gape at what once were treasured in our sacred palaces and temples. When this white-skinned one sees our store of treasure here, will he not, in spite of the great wealth already by our holy Old-one sent to his father, claim his birthright share—Sên King-lo's full one-seventh share—in all that is ours? I doubt it not! And when he does we cannot withhold, not a millet seed, not one tea-brick, not a glass bangle, not our cheapest laziest god, not an old cracked tea-bowl, not the oldest house-broom; for his father's full share is his by our immemorial ancestral law, which no Sên may break or disobey."

"Will he cut our gods into seven pieces—the profane heathen one?" a woman shrilled in alarm.

"He will demand his seventh share of all!" Sên C'hian Fan asserted bitterly.

An old man who had grown toothless in the service of the Sêns—as his peasant fathers for long generations had—rose from the corner he had squatted in, limped heavily to where Sên C'hian Fan sat in the *T'ien Ching's* honorable-rule-place, and ko'towed thrice before he begged with wheezy labored breath, "Grant, lord-one most high and ancient, that this thy

bug go now to the City of Victoria in our desecrated, stolen island of Hong Kong, and slay the white robber-dog-one as he leaves his ocean fire-boat."

The Sên senior in the main line, and therefore regnant, motioned the old decrepit back—but Sên's gesture was as affectionate as it was peremptory, and his eyes lingered kindly on the candidate for murder.

"We will set our dogs upon him at the outer gate," a Sên stripling cried hotly.

Some counseled gentler methods, one spoke of fire, two suggested poisons.

"Let us keep him our prisoner," spoke another.

That was how the Sêns in Ho-nan took the news of Sên Ruben's coming.

They would have none of him. They rejected and forbade him.

Sên C'hian Fan had summoned them while the Hour of the Hare was young, the great day-star pricking but sickly through the bat-black of the night; gathered them together here in the *T'ien Ching* on the first thin edge of daybreak, as serious Chinese conference should be held. But the day-star rode high above the mid-time of the Horse noon hour before their talking of "how" so much as dwindled. For all their unanimity of purpose they visioned and advocated method in almost as many ways as there were Sêns and faithful Sên retainers here. They canvassed it, tore and discussed it with hot, endless words as only Chinese do. The Sêns themselves, those of them who were man and adult, calmly and without gesture—for only when their kindred die may girdle-wearers gesture or show distraction; the peasant-born retainers less mannerly in face and demeanor.

Then a woman, smiling coldly, rose and stood before Sên C'hian Fan, gestured them imperiously, contemptuously to silence.

Instantly all were still.

The widowed concubine La-yuên rarely spoke now; when she spoke no Sên would ignore her words or interrupt them—and no retainer dared do either.

La-yuên's place was great in Sênland.

Once half the mirth and music of the flowery courtyards, now, almost with Sên C'hian Fan himself, she was their law-giver, almost with the gods and Sên Ya Tin their oracle.

Every tongue was silenced as she rose, every hand hidden in a sleeve, every eye riveted on the paintless face of the coarse-robed concubine, La-yuên.

When her lord Sên Po-Fang had died La-yuên had wailed loudest, torn her flesh fiercest. When he lay new-buried in the graveyard where they had left him, she had crept back to him, dug her a grave at his feet, hurled herself into it, pulled down the wormy earth upon her until it palled her in an airless prison and death-bed. She had been missed. Then, what she had done was suspected, and she had been hastily ungraved, brought back to consciousness after several days, and forced to swear before her lord's tablet that she would make no second attempt. And the concubine that Sên Po-Fang had loved had kept her word, for she was not highly educated, and did not know that Confucius had taught that the gods keep no record of enforced oaths. It had been impossible to let her die, for La-yuên had been big with child—but all the Sêns loved and revered her for the attempt she had made to follow her lord down to the Yellow Springs, there to solace his purgatorial hours and serve him. The Sêns would build for her a *pai-fang* memorial-arch when she went on-High, and she had great place and voice among them while she lived.

In her unhemmed one garment of rough hemp-cloth La-yuên cut a beggar's figure, and looked an aged shriveled woman. By years, she was younger than Ruby, Sên King-

lo's English widow, but grief had blasted her, self-burial had blanched and lined her, persistent fasting and self-tortures had bent and grizzled her—and La-yuên looked a grandmother of grandmothers.

But she stood her full height now, the little "secondary" wife of Sên Po-Fang who had loved and pampered her—stood facing the Sêns, defying and rebuking them.

"Curses be upon you," she shrilled, one skinny arm extended imperiously toward Sên C'hian Fan himself, her tear-worn eyes fierce on his. "You will give Sên Ruben great welcome and most honorable tending; Sên Ya Tin would have commanded it. Who here dares disobey our jade-and-lotus Old-one? Is this the mat-hut of some scurvy peasant woman, or is it the queendom of celestial Sên Ya Tin? There among the lemon trees stands the temple Sên Ya Tin builded to the honor of Sên King-lo, perfume gushing from the fountains among the yellow roses in its courtyard, wine in his feast-cup always before his memorial-truth-stone amid the snow azalias at the temple door. Shall you ill-welcome or misuse Sên King-lo's son in the very shadow of Sên King-lo's temple, carved of alabaster and jasper at the command of great Sên Ya Tin our queen-one? Are you Sêns, or are you Nippon vermin?"

Not one answered. Sên Ya Tin, the easy-going tyrant who had ruled them, had spoken to them through the paintless lips of her grandson's angered concubine.

They had cowed them—the old queen-one who had wailed Sên King-lo's death as a god's and the concubine who had hallowed herself forever with the suicide she had offered at the grave of Sên Po-Fang whom she had loved.

Sên Ya Tin and La-yuên had spoken, and none of all here dared dispute them—regnant ancestor and regnant concubine—until one brasher than all the rest—a woman, for in China only woman's tongue knows no bridle, ventured, "Is the man

who comes a Sên? We know he is white-faced and has yellow hair that ripples. Why should we think that the foreign-devil, she who bore him—”

An Pin's question was not finished. La-yuên caught a bamboo from Kow Yong Shu—the *doyen* of the dog-keepers—and smote An Pin across the mouth. Blood, not words, rushed from the mouth of An Pin. But La-yuên spoke.

“Vile one! Scavenger and lobster! Dirt-of-dirts! Liar! She was a pearl! There are more here than La-yuên who remember Sên Ruby. Her lord loved her. Heaven-like Sên Ya Tin received and acknowledged her, piled soft words and great privilege about her, gave her welcome, bade her god-speed. Sên King-lo walked beside his wife-one's litter when they went from the great gate, and Sên Ya Tin stood and watched them smiling, till the distance stole them, and she our old queen-one blessed them as they went. Always, until she went on-High, when Sên Ya Tin sent a token to Sên King-lo she sent a token to Sên Ruby. Where is the stomacher of diamonds that the Ming gave his favorite daughter when she came here a bride in her bride chair six hundred years ago? Where is Ya Tin's priceless gold-lacquer tobacco-box with the lizard of rubies on its lid? They are in the England, in the casket-for-jewels of the girl child of Sên Ruby, sent when the ruby-one bore her lord a daughter—a daughter whom Sên Ruby, whom her lord loved and honored, carried between her heart and girdle even here in the courtyards and pavilions of his people. Go! Go, thou stink-one, wash thy blood-dripping mouth in vitriol of snakes! Crawl in the presence of Sên Ruben who bears his mother's jewel-name—crawl in his presence, lest I slay thee. Sên Ruby is a white rose—the White Rose of China. Our lord her son comes not to take even his own from us. He comes to see the birth-place of his father, to worship by the grave of



our old queen-one Sên Ya Tin, and to greet his kindred. The Sên shall have a Sên welcome."

After that no more was said of slaying or rejecting him. And even did Sên C'hian Fan give order that the rooms and the pavilion of Sên King-lo should be readied and garnished for Sên King-lo's son.

But when a letter came from Peking, beautifully brushed in Chinese, a letter from Sên Ruben to his kinsman Sên C'hian Fan, telling that ere the fourth moon had come Sên Ruben would crave entrance at the great gate of his kindred, more than one of the Sên men frowned, and many of the women contrived to secure hide-holes and put their best jewels in them. That is how the Sêns in Ho-nan took it.

But An Pin kept from La-yuên's path.

## CHAPTER XX

**W**HEN Ruben tore himself away from Peking he still was wearing English dress.

Chinese as he was, and still more Chinese as he liked to believe himself, there was considerable Englishman in Ruben Sên—Sên Ruben. Had there been none, he could not have fitted so perfectly into English life as he had at public school and 'varsity, in the counties and in London. Half his blood was English, and sluggish as it ran now, it took some toll of his inclinations. Habit chained him—to his London tailor among other things. And English schoolboy-like, he knew himself a little shy of "fancy dress," especially of petticoats and rampant colors. But chiefly he still dressed as he always had, because both Sir Charles Snow and Kow Li had advised it—at least until he reached the interior where Young China was both less existent and less clamorous.



Both had advised it as a diplomatic compliance with the sartorial edicts of that same Young China which both disliked and distrusted almost equally. For Snow knew that the strident new dispensation must run its course—brief or long; and Kow Li quoted the old saying that he who rides a tiger must sit very tight, and dismount with great discretion. Nothing would be served by antagonizing any Chinese faction in these days of broil and flux, they both counseled. And Sir Charles had had another reason—he had seen no cause to state it—for urging his young kinsman to discard neither boots nor trousers. Snow remembered how the pallid-skinned American missionaries had been despised for wearing petticoats and “pig-tails” in Shanghai a decade or two ago—how it had offended many of the very Chinese they aped to propitiate. And Sir Charles knew that white-skinned, blue-eyed, fair-haired Ruben would look not more but even less Chinese clad in Chinese raiment.

But Ruben had no mind to cross his fathers’ threshold wearing Western garments.

In the guest-room of a little hill-perched temple, at which he lingered some days—partly that his chairmen might rest, partly because in some odd way the eerie place seemed to claim him—he changed into some of the garments that Kow Li had given him in London lest his young master might find such shopping an embarrassment in China, and prove inept at it, if not quite helpless. Kow Li knew what a Sên lord should wear in Sênland, and he was tremulously anxious that Sên Ruben should be branded by no avoidable solecism.

Sên Ruben had made perhaps a third of his slow cross-country journey from Peking to his father’s birthplace in Ho-nan, when he looked up and saw the tiny cloister built on the crest of a low hill, smiling in the sunrise.

It called him.

Sên bade his bearers lower his litter, and leaving it bade them wait—he might be some time.

Little loath his retinue—they were a score, all told—lit their brazier of charcoal, glad of its warmth, for the dawn was chill, and squatted about it smoking and chattering while their kettle-pot boiled, and their fish and rice cooked; and Ruben went alone to make his way to the temple, knock on its gate, and crave to rest and, if he might, explore. Zig-zagging steps of flat irregular stones—but easy enough, save for their length—led through hills of churned and broken rocks up to the little cloister. It was a small rectangular encampment, walled in here and there, of one-story tent-roofed buildings—all small. The monks' gardens were outside, one of vegetables and pot-herbs, one of lusty flowers, and the hills behind, misted and soft in the early pearl-tinted light, were verdure clad.

The monks had hewn their path and builded their steps through the up-thrown belt of rocks belched up æons ago by some fever of earth; hewn and builded so perhaps to remind that those who would climb to the plane of the gods must go on foot, almost in single file, and must tread a hard, rough way.

It was poor enough a place as Chinese temples go. Not many monks could house here or live on such scant garden produce. But the softly sparkling sunrise and its own jumble of picturesque lines gave it beauty, and an old majolica pagoda, that the centuries scarcely had tarnished, gave it character and dignity—and too, Ruben thought, significance and individuality. Such pagodas are not built in China now, and have not been for several centuries. The up-tilt-roofed low buildings clustered about it might have been run up yesterday.

Nine-storied, up-tapering, the pagoda, like the temple and out-houses, was angular; like them its roof dipped down in

delicious curves, but jutted out sharply to East and to West. A small company of "lions" and birds made of stone and of clay, such as are seen on almost every orthodox Chinese roof, sat upright and vigilant on the roof's ridges—guarding and befriending the humans that dwelt beneath—and the gods housed there. They were queer little symbolical animals jaunty and fierce, China's domestic dogs of spiritual war—often so tiny that a casual glance may not see them, but greatly essential to all that dwell beneath a Chinese roof.

The pagoda was bell-hung, and the two middle stories were windowed and balconied with rectangular lattice-work. Except the roofs, all its lines were straight and sharply angled.

There was no temple-gate, and Ruben hesitated to strike on the metal gong that swung at the open door; for, soaked as his mind was, and had been for years, in the ways and manners of China, yet he wondered whether the gong stood there on the temple's doorstep as a convenience for visitors or was a household utensil by which the abbot summoned his monks from their outer tasks to rice or to prayer. More likely that, he thought, for he suspected that few from "the world" ever came here. The temple stood alone and remote, far from even such half-beaten paths as Ho-nan can boast. Ruben had traveled by compass—as nearly as impassable barriers of rock and of turbulent streams would let him—rather than by any sort of roadways; which is how most who foot it in China must journey. The canals and streams are the roads of China.

He rather thought that the gong was not for wayfarers; he would wait, at least for a time, until some one came. It was pleasant here on the steps, and he was Chinese enough to feel neither in haste nor impatient. He squatted him down near the huge incense-holder of carven stone that stood at the temple's entrance, and lit a cigarette. Why not? The

temple priests smoke their pipes so—when they have the tobacco.

Matins! The priests were singing in the temple.

The rite was not long; and presently they came to sniff the early day's fragrance or to forecast the day's humor.

They were four, all yellow gowned: a fine-faced old abbot, a squat-faced boy novice, two others—one old and jolly, one middle-aged and sear; the entire community.

Sên Ruben rose, and bowed them the obeisance of respect.

Three returned it but the novice only stared.

As it chanced, none of them ever had seen a European or European garments before; but, except the uncouth boy-priest, they showed no surprise, no embarrassment and no displeasure—perhaps because being Chinese, their courtesy was entire and an instinct; perchance, because their life had disciplined and drilled them against resentment of aught the gods or earth-years sent them; a little, it may be, because a guest or chance wayfarer so rarely came to fleck the gray monotony of their solitude with a gleam of the outer world that any guest—even the oddest and most incomprehensible—was welcome; a drink in the desert.

They made him welcome. The abbot, surprised and pleased that one who looked so amazingly strange could speak their tongue, bade him stay as long as he chose; there was rice to spare, the temple boasted a guest-room, the room a mat and pillow.

The novice boy was sent down the long way Ruben had climbed to bid the traveler's servants wait while their master who, at least, would lie in the holy house to-night, tarried here. And the lad went readily enough to carry a message to the Chinese coolies below; scampered off with little of priestly dignity and with no reluctance at all to gossip a while with peasant-ones who lived in the world from which his parents' poverty had driven him.

Three days, three nights Sên Ruben lived the guest of the temple priests; anxious to reach his goal—the home of his fathers—yet glad to postpone so long what he knew might prove an ordeal. Both Snow and Kow had warned him of that, warned him that he might have to win and earn his welcome before his kinsmen gave it him—now that Sên Ya Tin was dead.

He was glad to serve a novitiate of his own here, in place and circumstance so peculiarly Chinese; and in serving it, to tune himself, he hoped, to the Chinese home to which he had crossed the world in pilgrimage.

He shared their “rice”—vegetables chiefly, appetizing enough to the priests, but always the same—and as he ate, squatted with them on the floor, he smiled a little, more than once. Thinking of some woman-one, three of them made no doubt, but the abbot whose mind was sweeter and shrewder—two human qualities that often go hand in hand—saw that the stranger’s smile was edged and was quizzical, and it was no heart-affair or tender dalliance that flitted across Sên Ruben’s face. The old abbot was right. Ruben had smiled into his basin of carrots and cabbage chopped up in *soy* because of a thought that came of London restaurants, lobster mayonnaise, Perrier Jouet ’76, pêche Melba, his mother’s *chef*, the service her butler gave.

Eton, Cambridge, and Kensington pricked him now and then as he lounged smoking on a pagoda balcony the next day watching the monks at work, almost knee-deep in their paddy bed. And at vespers in the gods-room, although it stirred him as no service at Queen’s ever had, Ruben Sên knew that homesickness twinged him—a longing to see his mother and Ivy.

For always the way of the Eurasian is hard and perplexed—a taint of his blood, a taint in his mind: canker.

The gods-room intrigued Sên Ruben and it rested and



soothed even more than it interested him. It appealed to him more—very much more—than had the larger, richer god-rooms of the Peking temples; perhaps because it seemed to him so truly apart from the secular world, so set apart, remote, dedicated, a little room to which rarely any but the four priests vowed to its service ever came; the solitary house of a solitary community, in a place of solitude far from the world.

It was packed with gods though only two or three were of fine workmanship.

A gorgeous belly-god, whose inordinate paunch was supported by his sacrificial table, whose ears were elongated balloons, whose very hands were mountainous with fat, was beautifully molded and exquisitely colored, and for all the billows of fatness that half hid them, his eyes, by some deft contrivance of fine artistry, sparkled and laughed. Sinister, that the starveling four who lived on rough vegetables, millet, occasional rice, infrequent inferior fruit, should needs serve the obese belly-god of gluttony; sinister and searching that they should serve him with chanted prayers, incense, flowers in his vases, red candles to make his glowing rubicon face still redder, and serve him with offerings of flesh tit-bits and wine that they themselves might not taste except at the Lanterns' once-a-year Feast, and then but scantily! Such is religion—in the East!

The wealth-god, cut from perfect ivory, had a sweet and saintly face. His monk-like white robes were severe and simple; he carried a flail in his thin, priestly hand: a chaste, immaculate figure, as beautiful as it was ridiculous!

*Lung Wang*, the god of clouds and water, was lacquer, and very lovely.

The other gods—more than forty—were tawdry and hideous.

*Kuan Ti* above the high-altar was but a fresco, ill-drawn,



badly colored—as were his wife on his left hand and his concubine on his right.

All the others, cheap and nondescript, little creditable to any heaven, scarcely creditable to any joss-house, were stacked on shelves, on the floor and in dark and dusty corners.

But Sën Ruben loved and revered them all for what they symbolized; for the Chinese fellowship they kept; for the service that these loyal priest-ones paid them.

Thrice from sunset to sunset the second priest struck the temple gong, and the four “yellow-robés” gathered here for chant and prayer; censed their gods, offered them wine and meat and cakes, lit their tapers, made them obeisance, recited droningly their ritual, and proffered silently, perhaps, prayers more individual and personal, if aught of personal wish that was more than the animal craving for food, or anything of true personality, could persist in lives so cramped and circumscribed.

Ruben doubted it of the younger three. The abbot he gaged higher; a soul attune to the sweet uses of solitude; a mind capacitated to profit by the discipline of meditation.

On the high-altar, an animal-headed god with attendants guarding it on both sides, stood a score of gigantic brass and stone candlesticks, many of them candleless—for the priests were poor; two small incense-holders, a beaten tray of joss-sticks, beautiful vases crammed with hideous artificial flowers, a small table-gong and mallet—used to call a drowsy god-one’s attention; a drum of mother-o’-pearl and embossed and painted parchment—used for the same purpose; and the three wine cups of the chief god and his wife and concubine. Near the altar, tasseled silver lamps hung down low on either side. There were tassels hanging down from almost every one of the crowded temple’s ornaments. A few feet from the North and South walls two pillars supported the arabesqued ceiling, one of rough stone, crudely carved, one of jasper pricked with

gold-stone and bits of turquoise color laid in in a delicate bamboo-shaped tracery. Around each of the pillars writhed an open-mouthed dragon, its scaled throat and horned head thrust out toward the altar, its great claws clasping the pillar firmly.

What did English-born, London-bred Ruben think of it all?

He thought it pathetic—at least, the human life-husks of the yellow-clad brethren. He thought the heterogeneous gods absurd—but yet—he thought them eloquent, felt them sacred. They emphasized to him a great people's—his people's—fealty to nature, China's sense of communion with wind and rain, things that grow, beasts that stalk, birds that fly. And he had seen "holy" figures every bit as ugly and preposterous on the continent of Europe. Sên Ruben was not ashamed of these gods of China.

One long night through he sat under the cherry trees beneath the glittering panoply of stars with his host, the abbot. And their talk was intimate. And when the sun crept up behind the pagoda Sên Ruben had thought of things he never had thought of before, and had learned, and learned to sense, things of China that neither Kow nor Snow ever had whispered to him.

He had gained a lasting memory; he had made a lasting friend, even though they two never met again.

Something of his story he told to the monk, who heard him gravely and then warned him, as Snow and Kow had, that his kinsmen might give him but scant welcome.

"Should it prove so, and you still are loath to leave China, come back to me, and be my son—while you will. Always your share of our all will await you here. And, if you come not, always at the Hour of the Dog prayer-time I will ask of our gods your welfare."

But Sên Ruben knew that he should not tarry long in China, now; knew that he should keep his tryst in London

with his mother, whether his kinsmen hailed and claimed him or rejected and forbade him.

Another day he lingered, "worshiping" in the temple prayer-room, working in the garden with the four priests. Then he left them, clad in his unaccustomed Chinese garments—beneath his vest a scapular the old abbot had blessed and given—left them, and went on towards "home," determined and anxious; going down the hill stairway a little awkwardly in his Chinese petticoat.

Ruben felt queer—and looked it.

He wondered if he could carry it off and wished that he had served some sort of private novitiate for this, by wearing padded shoes and all the rest of these in the seclusion of Kow Li's upper room in Bloomsbury.

The novice grinned like the ape he was, the young monk frowned, but the old head-monk gestured kindly approval, and blessed Sên Ruben gravely, and bade him gods'-speed.

One of the chairmen giggled like a girl, the others looked at him sourly, when Sên came into the temple courtyard where they waited for him. The abbot had sent for them. But the old monk walking beside Ruben rebuked them sharply and at that their faces turned again to the accustomed stolid indifference which is the livery of such servant-faces. They despised the old monk, because he was a monk, but they had no disrespect for the ill-charms he might work upon them. And whatever they thought or felt of the foreign devil dressed in finest Chinese clothes, he would see nothing of it again, for the monk-one had potentially cursed them hideously. A Chinese will risk most things for a laugh—but not an unmourned grave or a fire-crackerless burial.

Sên Ruben would not ride while the abbot walked. Presently the abbot blessed and left wine. Sên seated himself carefully and as easily as he could wound up in petticoats; the bearers lifted the chair-poles on to their shoulders and

trudged slowly down the rough path and off across Ho-nan.

The old monk stood in the temple door and watched them out of sight; then went in to give Sên Ruben the best red candle of their poor votive store, for he had liked the fair-haired boy who had given them great largesse, and more courtesy than Chinese monks are often paid.

## CHAPTER XXI

**L**I CH'UN is a movable feast, and the Sêns and all their vassal villages were celebrating it several moons later than it is most often held. The month of the Double Cherry had almost passed when they went forth to meet the Spring.

At sunrise—everything that does not begin earlier begins at sunrise in the land of the pagoda—the great gates were opened, and Sên C'hian Fan and all the thousand of his patriarchal household came slowly forth to wend their way to the eastmost point of the vast domain, to meet and greet the Spring as she came from Hu-peh to the fields and forests of their clan: an immense cortège to be swelled and lengthened two-score times as it wended its slow, ceremonial way—joined and augmented every few *li* by the outpouring of some village or townlet; all coming forth to keep the Beginning-of-Spring festival.

A man who had paused to rest at the white and silver pagoda, not knowing that as he left his litter not far from there, his foot fell for the first time on the ancestral lands of his own people, saw the endless processional coming in the distance, and drew into the vantage of a great catalpa's leafy shade, and waited, shadowed there to watch and listen, wondering what festival this gay-clad multitude was keeping; for Sên Ruben knew that the year's first moon was the keeping time of *Li Ch'un*.

Behind a busied conclave of musicians—horn-men, drum-men, gong-men, lute-players, music-basket carriers and boys who blew on flutes and silver-stringed shells—walked ten score of servants carrying flower-wreathed staves, tiny silken pouches, birds in splendid cages and trays of paper money, and looking down on them from his catalpa-shaded hill-slope, Sên Ruben's heart leapt when he saw stamped or sewn on each blue coat's back the servant-crest of his father's house.

Women and children had thronged out of the homestead's gates close beside the men; women and children had poured forth from every village and farm with the headsmen and all the headsmen's tribal following. But Sên Ruben saw neither woman nor child here. The way had been too long for all but sturdiest feet. And no woman might go with the joyous solemn processional to its end, for often miracle is vouchsafed at the ultimate moment when Spring and China meet; and no miracle can be consummated in the presence of a cat, a hen or a woman. Women and all the toddle-feet children had fallen out a few or a score at a time to wait in the meadows and near the path's sides, resting, munching sweetmeats and melon-seeds, gossiping and telling tales until they straggled back to join the home-returning of the men folk and older boys privileged to meet the Spring as it came into Sênland through the plum trees that behind the pagoda screened the Sên's Eastern flower-land from the woodlands of the family of Kem.

Inconspicuous—or so he hoped—in his dark plum-colored garments, the sober, traveling garb of a Chinese gentleman, Sên Ruben risked skirting the edge of the great jabbering throng, interested in seeing where they were going, and in watching what they did—more interested in watching them, for all were his clansmen or their vassals, he made no doubt, and some among them his close of kin. Which? Sên Ruben wondered.



There were no blue eyes here; he saw no hair that was fair; but now and then a man passed close to him almost as fair of skin as he—fair-skinned as his mother. No one had told him that some Chinese were so nearly white. He was glad to find it so—seeing it for the first time here in the home province of his own people. He was glad, because it made him feel his own face less of an ugliness (and Sên Ruben worshiped beauty); less an offense to other Chinese eyes; less the bar-sinister that, in spite of his loyal love of his mother, it always had seemed to him.

They began to sing a hymn of Spring, a welcome-song to the flowers, an invocation to all the honorable grains—the millet, buckwheat, maize, rice and wheat; a prayer and a propitiation to sun and rain, soil and wind, to the spirits that dwelt in them, and ruled them, giving the command to yield the honorable ground's best plenty to these the worshipping sons of Han, or to shrivel the Earth's fruits in her womb, that famine and want might stalk through the fields and gardens of Ho-nan.

Those following there were actors he knew—he had seen too many pictures of their fantastic head-dresses and elaborate costly apparel, so unlike the every-day garb of every-day Chinese, not to be sure of that. They sang and gesticulated as they walked but Ruben could not catch the words. He had caught most of the Ho-nanese folk-songs and hymns, and he thought he should have understood Mandarin, even sing-songed. But the Pekinese the actors chanted he could not understand, except here and there a word and that it was Peking-tongue—probably the only one of China's many languages that the stage-folk knew, since they are for the most an ignorant lot, though technically exquisitely skilled. Almost invariably now a Chinese actor is a native of Pechilli province.

Those carried there in their sedan chairs were gentlemen—



not because their raiment was fine, and they wore jades in their caps—but because of their great repose, the clear command in their quiet eyes, and the clean-cut chiseling of features and motionless hands. They were Sêns, some of them, no doubt; probably most of them; Sêns, and he was a Sên! Most of them were old enough to remember his father, to have been at home with Sên King-lo there when he had brought Sên Ruby, the White Rose of China, to his home and his people here in Ho-nan. Sên Ruben's soul kindled.

Another cohort of musicians followed the litters; musicians playing softly as they went, softly as if to woo the timid spring from her vestal hiding behind a veil of snow-gauze from the crabbed breath of winter.

Hello! What was that?

Not—but it must be—the Spring-Ox! So—this was *Li Ch'un*, the great greeting-of-Spring festival, oddly belated till now.

The gigantic, grotesquely painted Ox, which, for all that body and bones, was but paper, was carried by more than twenty men and its weight required them all.

Sên Ruben did not smile at the weird absurd Spring-Ox, for he knew what it meant—and he was Chinese.

If ever he had doubted that in England, he did not doubt it now as his heart leapt to the Spring-keeping of his race. And his English mother could not have doubted it, never again could have doubted it, if she could have watched him now, as his eyes leapt, and his fair face lit.

Sên Ruben had come home.

Sên Ruben knew that he had come home.

The soft dry air, still with a gentle tang of racier Winter in its sweet bouquet, that rippled through the varnish-trees and elders, was mother's milk to the eager, quivering sense of Sên Ruben. The place, the time, the thronging Chinese

people, the eager, symbolical procession—all were sacramental to him.

Standing here, quick to it all, he thought as he watched his kinsmen's leisurely litters, of taxis in Piccadilly, trams on the Embankment, 'buses in the Strand. His lip curled a little. He thought that Ho-nan kept the seemlier, manlier pace, and he saw more reasonableness, more health, more dignity, many times more beauty in this bedecked and musicked threading of life's twisted maze than he ever had in the push and tangle of London's harder ways, London's more emphatic thoroughfares.

Sên Ruben did not follow on with them to the climax and end of their road. He felt that a Sên should not do that on foot. He did not care to stand there in the crush of the outer crowd. He would present himself to his kindred, as a home-returned prodigal should, within the walls that girdled the dwelling house, or at the great ceremonial gate. He would not stand aside with their retainers—still less with the peasants and villagers not of their blood, but only of their thrall—nor would he intrude his presence and kinship upon them, the seniors of his clan, until they had accepted his credentials and anointed him with welcome.

Next year perhaps—some year certainly—he would ride with them, his litter carried among theirs, as they went in state to meet and welcome the Spring.

He knew every item of the climax of the ceremony when at the Eastern edge of their land they met the Spring. Another year he would share it, have in it his part, return to the great house with them, pass in with them to the great decked garden, help to beat the Ox, to drive it to work hard and well—a symbol that all the agriculturists who tended the fields and orchards of Sên would be industrious through all the moons of planting, tending and reaping, until the Feast of Lanterns came to give a nation of faithful husbandmen

almost a moon of festival and holiday. He would help to slaughter and burn the gigantic Ox and the *Mang-Shên*—the huge paper man that was following it there, its driver and plowman, the hardworked god of agriculture.

For all the Chinese gods work; they have but little play-time; less even than the busy-bee people of China do; and of China's many gods the god of agriculture and *Ts'ai Shên*, the god of wealth, work hardest of all. *Mang-Shên* rarely rests, *Ts'ai Shên* never rests at all.

The head of the Ox was painted a glowing yellow, a sign to the watching peasants that the coming summer would be greatly hot. But there would be days of heavy rain, too, for *Mang Shên* was hatless, but wore very stout shoes. The inordinate number of *Mang's* garments repeated the yellow-headed Ox's promise of intense heat; the scarf of white that belted *Mang Shên's* coat and loins promised long moons of good health—for the gods are spirits, and reverse all the sartorial customs of men, wearing white for joy and red for woe.

Sên Ruben was glad to see *Mang* girdled with white, and was glad of the promise of heat that the Ox and its driver gave; Sên Ruben rejoiced in heat.

Not to-day would he seek or ask admission into that great home of his that shone down there in the wood-girthed meadows like a jewel in an exquisite setting of green—not to-day when all the vast place was a-seethe with the keeping of *Li Ch'un*.

His home-coming should be in some tranquil hour of quiet.

To-night he would lie where his chairmen were camped beside a willow-hung gurgling stream where the pink-backed trout were snoozing.

Sên Ruben, with a last long wistful look after his kindred as they went, turned and slipped away, his going as unnoticed, he thought, as his presence had been unmarked.

## CHAPTER XXII

**L**ONG before he reached his camp Ruben knew that some one was following him.

At first he thought that some other was taking by chance this same path as he; but he thought it odd that even one of all that countryside had kept apart from the jubilant anxious throng that went forth to meet the Spring and to bring Ox and Ox-driver back to the cremation that would send down their ashes to till and to urge under the ground, sending up the fructified grains to bulge the bins of the Sêns. Some woman or child, perhaps weary of waiting for the procession's return, or sent on some imperative errand, it might be; for the tread that followed his was light.

Then he knew that whoever it was was following him; told it by the inexplicable, voiceless oracle that we never see, but that always we feel—and usually heed.

Ruben swung round and waited.

A woman—in mourning! Excluded for that from the day's jollification? He never had heard though that they that mourned might not worship; and *Li Ch'un* was a worship of Spring.

The woman came more quickly on, and when she had gained to where he stood waiting, ko'towed and threw herself at his feet.

In trouble? Wanted his help? he wondered.

She should have it! The first of his race who had claimed his succor here in the Province of his fathers!

"What would you?" Sên Ruben asked—and his voice was a promise.

The woman lifted up her head, reached up towards him her close-clasped hands, in gestures of salutation and of fealty—and she still knelt at his feet.

"Hail, lord-one! Nine times three times welcome home, noble son of thy celestial father!" the woman cried, half sobbing. Ruben saw the wet on her face.

"Who are you?" he questioned her gently.

"Thy slave!" the kneeling woman told him passionately. "I am your slave-one, noble lord of our noble clan—your slave and the widowed concubine of the pure and elevated, honorable Sên Po-Fang who keeps his fragrant state on-High now with his holy hand on great Ya Tin's girdle."

"How comes it that you know me?"

"That, great lord, La-yuên the concubine-one cannot say. She thinks the trembling leaves of the soap-tree whispered it to her as you passed her, she sitting there in the cool of its fragrant shadow waiting to see *Mang-Shên* come back. I know that the lotus-like lord-one is Sên Ruben, the son of Sên King-lo whom Ya Tin so loved that she builded for him a temple lovelier, costlier than all other temples here in our Queendom. Ya Tin, the green jade of all women, rules us now from on-High, as she ruled us here in her house and courtyards, because her soul is great and her heart a day-star and of infinite wisdom. Hail and welcome! Sên Ruben, son of Sên King-lo, son of Sên Ruby, the White Rose of China—Sên Ruby whom La-yuên the concubine loved with a great love that was humble."

Ruben flushed. He had thought that his own name for his mother, though never, for some deep hidden reason, to her had he called her so. And now this widowed "secondary" of a dead Sên, crouching down in the dust at his feet, clad in the coarse unbleached sackcloth-like stuff of Chinese widowhood, spoke of his mother so. Perhaps his father had called her so!

Sên Ruben bent and lifted La-yuên up to her almond-nut-shaped feet. And she giggled a little as he did so, because since she had come to Sên Po-Fang's harem, little more than



a pretty painted child, no hands of a man, save only the hands of Sên Po-Fang, had touched her before.

"You have not her deep beautiful color," the woman said commiseratingly, "but something you have of her face-features, this concubine-person thinks, and I hear in you her voice, though deeper since a man's. However, I know, I know, my lord-one, that you are hers, as surely as I know that you are lord Sên King-lo's. She spoke not our tongue of Ho-nan, but my ears hear her voice in yours. Comes not my lord now to his home? Your feet go from it as you went, before you turned at the sound of mine. There"—she pointed—"behind that glade of oak and sycamore lies the great gate of your people's wall. This way you went leads to nowhere, honorable lord Sên Ruben."

"It leads to my camp," Ruben told her. "There I will lie to-night, and to-morrow, when their busied time of *Li Ch'un* is past, will I beg the welcome at the gate of our house."

La-yuên screamed in dismay. "Lord-one, lord-one," she protested, "it is not for you to lie out in the open wild like a coolie who toils for his rice. Come in through your own walls, La-yuên implores, and this your slave will do all for your honorable comfort until those more fit to welcome you come home with *Li Ch'un* and *Mang-Shên*. True, there are few there to serve the lord Ruben, but at the Hour of the Hen those noble ones will come, and until their fragrant return the larders of the kitchens are bursting with succulent salt-things, or if my lord eats sweet, as do the white tribe of his honorable mother, there are cases and cases of sweetmeats. Your slave, the widowed concubine-one, has the keys of the wine-room; she will draw for you flasks of the golden wine of Shantung, and when she has washed from your beautiful feet the dust of the way that has presumed to approach their elegant loveliness, she will coax her lute to sing to you.

La-yuên is skilled in the touch of the music lutes. I entreat you, come home!"

"To-morrow, kind widow-one, I will come, and then you shall make me sweet music, and give me the flowers-and-jades of the larder—I too 'eat salt' more often than I 'eat sweet,' and we will drink together, you and I, to the souls of our ancestors."

"My lord! my lord"—La-yuên did not giggle now; La-yuên was painfully shocked—"speak not such uncouth thing in the ears of Sên C'hian Fan and Sên Jo Hiêsen! They would misjudge it. The concubine may not moisten her lips in the presence of a lord-one!"

Ruben laughed. "I will maintain the greatest circum-spection in the presence of my august kinsmen, doubt not you that. And for that same estimable reason—our Sage would command it—Sên Ruben will not break in among his kinsmen like some wolf of the forest that prowls at the night hours—see, already the day-star turns and bends lower up in the heaven clouds—but will come as a Sên should come to the Sêns when the star rises up trailing its jeweled robes behind it, throwing them before it—rises up from the East side of our Earth ball."

"Must so it be, great lotus bud of a lotus clan?" La-yuên asked sorrowfully.

"It must, kind widow-one; for I know that so it should be. Turn you back now; retrace your way to the others who watch at the wayside for the return of *Mang-Shên*; I go on to where my camp waits my return. I bade that it waited until I came or sent. To-morrow you shall greet me again within the gates of our people."

"Show me first," the woman pleaded, "where your place of halt lies, that I may find it. Then will this slave-one obey you and leave you—not to go again to the throng of women-

ones and babe-ones that wait chattering at the waysides and on the hill-slopes for the procession's come-back, but to hasten her to the home-place, that she may bring to her lord-one Sên Ruben comforts for his night-time, basins of fit eat-things, flasks of rich drink-things, soft mats for his lie-on, warm rugs that he be covered, for the night dew is chill, lord-one. All that she can carry she will bring, making the journey again and again."

"That you shall not," Ruben said gently, "none of it! I forbid it."

La-yuên held out her hands in entreaty.

"I forbid it! Truly, kind-one, my camp-place is well furnished with all that I need."

La-yuên wrung her hands.

She no longer disputed his decision, but she murmured despairingly, reproachfully too—for all her voice's humility, "If our great Old-one were here with us, she would beat me that I lay on my soft mat while the son-one of the lord Sên King-lo lay without his own walls. Nor will I! All this night-time I will lie out in the cotton garden with the scare-crows, where the night-bats make the sleep-hours a flap-noise with the clamor of their leathern wings. And I will fast until you come, for so Sên Ya Tin would command, the jade-like Old-one who so loved Sên King-lo that she builded to him a temple the fairest in Ho-nan, and so loved his wife Sên Ruby, the White Rose of our clan, that always, by Sên Ya Tin's command, in the temple of Sên King-lo burns a ruby candle to the honor of the lady Sên Ruby."

"I would see it," Sên Ruben said eagerly. "Can I see it from yonder hill-slope?"

"No, lord-one; but if you will suffer this secondary to lead you but a short space beyond those walnut trees there by the water, you shall see its roofs shining like golden water rippled in the sunshine."

Sên Ruben caught his breath, turned and followed La-yuên without a word.

Even when they had reached the summit of the hillock carpeted with Spring's wild flowers, beyond the walnut grove, and the woman paused, neither spoke.

Nor did La-yuên look at Sên Ruben. It was not for her to watch his face as he looked on the temple that old Sên Ya Tin's love had builded in bribery to the gods for the purging of Sên King-lo's soul, that it might be received on-High at last, all its soil of Western sojourn, Western marriage forgiven; all his stain washed away by the purification of her prayers, the vigils she had kept, the incense she had burned, the costliness and beauty of the dedicated temple. Yellow roses sprang across from a trellis of lacquer to a trellis of jasper and roofed with a mat of leaves and buds and blooms incense burners of silver and of jade; it was a temple of indescribable loveliness.

### CHAPTER XXIII

**L**A-YUÊN the concubine had not overpraised it; Ya Tin had not overpromised it when she had said to Sên King-lo at their parting, "I will raise a *pai-fang* for thy pardon of our gods; I will build a great temple on the hill where the peach-trees cram the melons on its slope and the cypresses wear the winter snow on its crest."

In all China—where man's hands have achieved the most—no lovelier thing than this ever was achieved; not even when Marco Polo, whose eyes had surfeited on the sumptuous beauty of Venice, saw Hangchow the jewel city of earth, as it was.

Ruben had seen it before in his dreams. For often Kow Li had boasted and crooned to him of the pearl-of-all-temples.

But Ruben Sên had not seen this!

Matched to the reality, the dream was poor and cheap; for the boy dreaming in London had had but his knowledge of the tawdrier buildings of Europe from which to filch the fabrics of his dream temple.

High on the hill slope, in a garden of peach trees, Ya Tin had builded of marbles and ivory the temple whose incredible cost was small in comparison to its beauty; a great low, one-storied temple that lounged on the peach-tree hill like a great sprawled, sun-drunk dragon of ten thousand glittering jeweled scales.

Winds and rains and the heat-torrents of summer had stained the twisted ivory columns a delicate apricot, but the marbles of the alternate pillars—white, pink, green, one blue, one gold, two red-veined black, one of gold-stone from Kokonor, two the color of blood—were as undiscolored as when Sên Ya Tin's workmen had heaved them into place, fresh and virgin from mallet and chisel.

The few broad steps that led up to the temple door were of solid malachite, their edges encased in lead open-work. The temple's windows—four at the East to welcome the day-star's coming, four at the West to hold the stain of his going as long as they could on the temple's lacquered floors—were latticed with lace insertions of silver, threaded with wires of gold and paned with painted and embroidered silk.

The temple roofs of pale-bronze tiles looked like tents of scaled gold. Little beasts of clay and of pottery squatted and perched and lolled on its ridge poles and corners. Long tassels of iridescent glass dangled from the roof's up-curved lips, lamps and lanterns of elaborate workmanship hung and swung from its eaves. The under-sides of the fluted out-jutting roofs were intricately carved and inlaid, their very edges delicately scalloped.

About three of the great outer pillars enormous metal,



clinging dragons twisted and writhed, their heads of gold thrust out, their open, coral-lined snarling mouths and angry red-lacquer tongues menacing all evil-comers, their restless jeweled eyes aflame in the sunlight.

Two great pelicans—one of burnished steel and copper and bronze, one of chisel-feathered stone—stood on either side of the temple's approach. One held in his polished beak the chains of a gong, the other a hanging incense-holder; and the pelican of stone itself was an incense-burner so cunningly contrived and wrought that up through his feathers always twisted thin spirals of perfumed smoke-burning incense never suffered to burn out and die; for Sên Ya Tin dying nearly a dozen years ago had willed and charged it so.

The sky above was cloudless molten blue; the trees behind were a tapestry of splendid greens, from the nearly black of the cypress trees to the apricot-green of the peach-trees' baby leaves; jade and emerald bamboos, moss and sea-greens; a lovely jumble of green that ravished the eye and rested the soul and mind; a gentle, quivering, imperial arras behind the loveliest temple in China, built by a Chinese woman for a Chinese man who had erred in marriage, and strayed and stayed in barbarian heathen lands and ways.

Beyond the temple a *pai-fang* spanned a gurgling stream that sang and danced over its bed of pebbles beneath soft banks of violets and ferns, forget-me-nots and tiny musk roses sewn thickly with little wild lilies and nodding, head-heavy daffodils.

Sên Ruben could not hear the music the brook made, but he saw its bubbling dance of green and blue and gold and pearl. He knew his father had dabbled baby hands in it. He knew that temple and costly crimson *pai-fang* were a prayer for the peace of his father's soul.

Sên Ruben gazed and knelt, looked long, and covered his face with his sleeve.

There was utter silence here.

The bamboos bent and swayed as if in welcome and kindly attendance. The foliage of oak and cinnamon-maple stirred a little in the Spring's pleasant air. Violets and anemones quivered gratefully in the grass. A squirrel watched shyly, very still up in a silver-stemmed red beech.

Sên Ruben looked again.

His face was as still as the squirrel's, almost as soft and shy, but his heart was quivering; his being shook.

The beauty over there on the hill of peach-trees with tiny green, new-come melons lumping the vines and cluttered between the peach-tree trunks moved him; but a thousand times more he was moved because of what *pai-fang* and temple said to him.

They spoke; he heard.

Sên Ruben thought that his father Sên King-lo and old Sên Ya Tin, who had loved and not misunderstood, stood on the temple porch and smiled at him.

Who shall say?

Sên Ruben rose.

The dress he wore no longer seemed strange to him. He drew his fan from his sash and gestured with it respect and fealty—and smiled.

"Can you lead me there?" Ruben asked, without turning his head or his eyes.

"This slave can lead you, flower-like lord," La-yuên did not turn towards him or lift her eyes from the ground as she spoke.

"I would go," Ruben murmured.

"It is no too far," the woman answered.

"I would lie there to-night—alone. I wish that none may know."

"No one need know," La-yuên told him. "It is this same

concubine widow—one who feeds at sunset the belly of the incense pelican. She will lead you, sir; and when at the Hour of the Hen she has filled it with adequate powdered sandalwood, she will leave her lord, not to return to him until the hour he has bade that she should."

"To-morrow's morrow at the Hour of the Snake I would go as I have come—unseen, unknown."

"It shall be," La-yuên said.

"Lead me the way." Ruben turned to her.

And La-yuên lifted then her face and looked at the lord Sên Ruben—and she smiled. No one had seen La-yuên smile since Sên Po-Fang had died—not even Sên O-i-t'ing her son, for the babe she had borne her dead lord had died at its birth and lay in an unmarked grave at a far edge of the Sêns' garden of tombs.

Then La-yuên—when she had ko'towed, once to Sên Ruben, twice to the temple Sên Ya Tin had builded of marble and jasper, of ivory and brass and lead, jade, malachite, and of prayer and love—turned and went through the lemon and *ginko* trees, on through the camphor trees, through a glade of golden willows, through a world of wild white roses, over a meadow of violets until they came to a vine-hidden lane that led to the temple.

La-yuên's heart sang as they went—as it had not since her lord had died. But the heart of Sên Ruben was so full that it ached.

The tender, red-tipped leaves of the peach-trees were uncurling in the warming spring; here and there on their glossy stems of spray a little soft clot of velvet thickness, the size of a baby nut, was a peach that before Autumn had come would swell into a wrinkled ball of luscious meat covered in sumptuous colors of ripeness. Blue and jade butterflies were taking their first flight. The grass belched out the sweetness of mignonette, thyme and verbena underneath the easy

crunch of their padded feet as the man and woman went across it, and in Ho-nan even the grass is sweet.

Neither spoke as they went. It was not for La-yuên to speak to the lord she guided unless some word or gesture of his bade her speak; and Sên Ruben was speechless.

The day-star marked the Hour of the Hen on the temple eaves and stained its gold on the green of the temple steps.

Sên Ruben stood and watched the woman while she replenished the fragrant smoldering fire stored in the gray stone pelican's body.

Then she left him without a word passing between them.

He knew that she would come as he had bade. La-yuên knew that he would keep his vigil alone.

And the woman knew that he would fast here at his lord father's temple and arch. It was not for her to bring him food here. His thoughts and his pious fealty would feed and strengthen him.

Sên Ruben would not touch coarser food than meditation and prayer here. But perchance he would bathe his brow and his wrists, and would drink at the bubbling silver brook that danced and laughed between the crimson shafts of Sên King-lo's *pai-fang*.

## CHAPTER XXIV

ON a garden bench in Surrey, the seat on which her father had died in her mother's arms—but the girl did not know that—Ivy Sên sat leaning against her lover. His arms were about her, his face on her hair.

Gaylor was very fond of the girl he was going to marry in less than a week, in the gray village church back of Mrs. Sên's rose garden.

Ivy Sên loved fiercely—so intensely that everything else was wiped from her consciousness.

The girl's burning happiness frightened her mother, who knew how terrible the disillusion would be, if disillusion ever came. And Ruby Sên knew how few marriages ever escaped disillusion for all time—knew that every human relationship must walk on the ground now and then. She feared what it would do to Ivy, if but once the ecstasy that so intoxicated the girl now were to sicken or dull.

But Ruby Sên was pathetically thankful that Ivy was going to marry a man whom she loved, simply and sweetly as happy girls did.

Against any adventurer or one he had suspected of that, Charles Snow would have set a face of flint; would have tightened relentlessly the strings of the Sên purse over which, by King-lo's will, he had considerable control. But his one semi-official interview with Gaylor had given Sir Charles no loop-hole for that.

He was convinced that Gaylor would go on with the marriage even if Ivy were to receive not a penny of income from her father's estate, not so much trousseau as a small tradesman's daughter. All ground for financial objection was cut from under his feet.

To Gaylor he could find no objection.

To be sure, he told the other plainly, he should prefer Ivy not to marry, and told him why. But he did it altogether in loyalty to a promise he had made to dying Sên King-lo and not because he believed that it might affect Gaylor.

Gaylor took it more gravely than Sir Charles had expected. But he gave no sign that he would retract because of what Snow had said, and Snow left it at that. He had put up no such fight as he had with young Sên King-lo years ago in Washington. He had loved the Chinese boy who was far



from home and kindred; he did not love this Englishman who was in his own country, and presumably able to look after himself. The Gaylors had greeted Ivy cordially. Lady Gaylor was "a hard-pated mondaine" whom Snow much disliked, but he believed that Ivy would more than hold her own against any mother-in-law. She had expressed herself delighted at her son's engagement, and seemed to mean it.

Lady Snow pounced upon her husband as soon as Gaylor had gone. The interview had not been long.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Right enough, I think," Sir Charles said a trifle drearily, "at least he is, I mean."

The wife nodded contentedly. Whatever dear old Charlie wished, Emma Snow wanted Ivy to have her chance, and had no doubt at all that Ivy's only chance of happiness lay in a successful marriage. Certainly Tom Gaylor was right enough, and a bit more than that, she considered. Ivy would marry some one; that was written; and surely the poor little thing had a right to her one chance if ever a girl had. Life had been hard luck on Ivy. But in Gaylor the queer child had chosen rather wisely. And all might be well with her now. London did not mind Ivy's Chinese face; evidently Tom Gaylor didn't either. And that was that. Lady Snow wished them both luck.

"So—" she purred, "you didn't turn him down!"

"Gave me no chance to. He is a nice fellow. I've no doubt of that. Not too much mind, but breeding, of course, and more than the average share of character. A bit thick-skinned, but good-hearted—very. Well, his thick skin, if I am right there, may come in very useful to him; and his goodness of heart useful to her! He is only moderately in love with Ivy, Emma."

"Charlie!"

"It's true, dear. I am sure that he does not know it; but I do."

"Why did he propose to her then? You say he has character; every one who knows him well says that."

"I said that I believed he had more than the average share. In my opinion the average share is very little."

"Why do you think he will find a thick skin useful?"

"Often is." And Lady Snow knew that, try as she might, she could drag no clearer answer than that from her husband.

"Why does he want to marry Ivy, if he is not in love with her?"

"I did not say that he was not in love with her. He is—moderately."

"Moderate love!"

"Wears best sometimes; very often stands most strain, comes through disillusion best. Oh, Gaylor is fond of her. And I have no doubt that he always will play the gentleman. That is the best security their future has."

"Ivy loves him very much. She is a changed creature."

"Yes," Snow agreed. "And I suspect that is what has done it. Ivy, impetuous in love, as in everything else under her sun, fell madly in love with Gaylor from the word go. I was with Ruby the day they met, Ivy and Gaylor. She broke into her mother's room—a new girl—and as good as told us. She was out on the river with Blanche and Blake; they ran into him—Gaylor; Ivy clapped her eyes on him, and made him a present of her heart then and there, gave it to him with both hands. Blanche saw it."

"You don't mean—" Emma Snow began miserably.

"That little Ivy 'ran after' Gaylor? Certainly not. But what Blanche saw—not a very observing woman, dear—probably Gaylor felt and it drew him. That is how I read it then, Emma, and how I read it to-day. It drew him, and he warmed to it; caught fire more or less from her, and from her appeal-

ing loveliness of a type he never had seen. There is only one Ivy Sên in London Society. That accounts for a lot. Besides, his chivalry was stirred. He felt it was up to him to make the running. He's that sort. She fascinated him and allured him. But—probably without knowing it—Gaylor pitied Ivy and played up. And that is the great danger I see for their future—and I see several. Love is not akin to pity. That is a flabby, putrid theory, Em. Pity creates a pseudo-love—a poor weak sort—fragrant and pretty while it lasts; but it never lasts—can't last, for it has no root."

"I hope you are wrong!"

"I hope I am. Time will show."

Blanche Blake had seen how it was with Ivy that first day on the river; Gaylor had not. He had thought Miss Sên a great good sport, and very sweet, to meet him as she did after their sorry encounter at Burlington House. And he instantly had thought that what he unfortunately had said there would have remained unsaid and unthought if the Chinese lady on the R.A.'s canvas had been one-tenth as pretty as Miss Sên was.

The rest had followed as most such conflagrations do. And theirs had had fuel and to spare. It still burned brightly six months later, warming them both, heart and body, as they sat together in the moonlight in the garden at Ashacres on almost their wedding eve.

It had surprised Mrs. Sên almost as much as it had pleased her that Ivy had chosen to be married quietly in Brent-on-Wold parish church instead of elaborately in London. Lady Gaylor had protested almost violently. A number of people, with much less right to dictate or meddle, had also protested; several had coaxed. Ivy had smiled, and taken her way. Ivy Sên's heart was too full for her to tolerate a "function." She felt that she must be alone, as nearly as she could—alone with her joy and her lover on her wedding-day.

Ruben's face when he read his mother's letter telling him of Ivy's unexpected decision quivered tenderly, and his blue eyes misted. "How she must love him!" he whispered to the roses in the old Ho-nan garden. A fear for his sister that had cut chill at his heart for years melted and went as he read his mother's letter. He wished he had known Gaylor. His heart was warm to the man who, the mother wrote, had made life a new and sweetened thing to Ivy.

The moon flooded the fragrant garden and did its best to make the old and rather ugly church beautiful—a squat, ordinary building with a square disproportioned battlemented clock tower. The Brent-on-Wold church had but two beauties: the ancient yew that almost dwarfed it—a yew from which the loyal parishioners had paid their tribute of bow-and-arrow wood to their King centuries ago—and the great stained-glass East window that would have jeweled any cathedral in England. It was the window that Ruby Sên had given as a memorial of her Chinese husband.

The man drew the girl still closer, and she buried her face on his coat with a little fluted sob.

## CHAPTER XXV

THE Sêns were washing their cats.

The Sêns were not cat worshipers, but a royal-born Sên woman had been, and the clan revered her memory, and clung to her old custom religiously—and half in prank. They washed their cats once a year. A Chinese cat rarely is loved—but almost invariably it is cherished.

The older and uglier the cat, the greater its value; for the old and ugly ones are those efficacious in their performance of the destiny for which they are born—the driving off and holding at bay every evil demoniac influence that threatens

the dwelling's outer gate or door. Old cats are sacrosanct, most especially those that are fierce-faced, loud-voiced and ill-tempered; kittens are tolerated. For it is as difficult to achieve an old and venomous cat without the antecedent of kittenhood as it is to make an omelette without breaking an egg or two.

The Sêns were proud of their birds and their dogs, their cattle and deer, and were fond of them too, but they had scant affection for their cats—except here and there an indiscriminating little toddler who “liked little pussy” because its coat was soft and warm and its temper, not yet infuriated by the bondage and indignity of being chained, was bent on frolic. But since cats are a necessary adjunct of every great Chinese establishment, the house-and-yard-proud clan liked their cats to be particularly well kept. And to-day—the second day after *Li Ch'un*—was a great day in the princely Ho-nan homestead.

Like every great function in China, Wash-the-Cats had begun almost before dawn's first faint crack.

The wash place steamed and smelt of soap. More than a hundred cats yowled—not in unison. Most of them struggled, many of them scratched, some of them bit.

The Sêns, a great and puissant family, enormously rich, cultured for centuries, squatting on the ground or kneeling, vigorously labored at scores of small wash-tubs. They were doing it with serene good-temper and with as much gentleness as the struggling and squirming of five score well-soaped and soaked cats allowed.

Because their Wash-the-Cats was somewhat sacerdotal, men, as was fit, were doing the work, while the women lounged about them, watching, advising, criticizing and chattering almost faster and shriller than yowled and swore the angry and disgusted cat-ones.

The children ran and toddled and crawled in and out



among their mothers, between the tubs, off to the flowers; chasing the butterflies, romping with each other, trying to romp with the puppies and dogs; but that could not be accomplished to-day! The most frolicsome dogs in Ho-nan had something far more delectable than playing with children and babies to-day! The day of the cats' martyrdom was the great joy-day of the dogs. Each kept as close to the soapy fray as it was allowed, and watched with delighted, bulging eyes, gloating over the suffering, angered cats. Even the puppies were tense and quiet, held tight and fixed in the leash of their own appreciative excitement. Not that the Sên dogs ever annoyed, much less tortured, the cats of the place; the Sên dogs were too well bred and far too well trained for that. But the ancestral enmity that had raged and waged when China was a manless forest of wild things, perhaps, persisted despite the human discipline that veiled it; and the Sên doggies loved "Wash-the-Cats" and hugged as close as they could to its strident core, feeding fat the ancient grudge of the old primeval days.

It was a busy scene, unique perhaps in Earth's civilization; such a scene as only one country—China—ever shows; and there only to be seen in such great and conservative households as this, a family of Chinese nobles earnestly washing their cats—doing it carefully and gravely; men whose fathers had been kings, whose nursing mothers had been queens before China was an empire.

It has been said, in Western print, that there is no caste in China. In every essential sense no land has ever had more caste than that greatest of all the democracies, the Chinese Empire. Though to-day no longer an empire in name it is not yet in soul—perhaps never will be—the social tatterdemalion that the gossipy press of Europe and America judge and report it. Caste in China is not as caste in India, even less as caste in Europe, but it exists, and it is adamant.



Wealth does not touch it, poverty cannot tarnish it; ancestry, education and character make and uphold it—nothing else enters into or approximates it at all. Even the Chinese cats have caste. Chinese dogs are demarked by it sharply; from the flea-bitten and flea-biting pariah-mongrels of wharf-side and alley to the sleeve-dogs accouched by royal midwives and reverently portrayed by China's greatest artists. But Chinese cats wear their caste with a difference. One cat passes through many castes; some Sên cats through as many as the ages of man once were counted on Avon.

But the seven castes of these being bathed may be roughly grouped into three: the kittens not yet promoted to active service, the slayers of mice and rats, the door-and-gate guardians.

Mere servants were washing the kittens, those callow, untried, mischievous youngsters not yet trusted or tested in either of the two honorable cat industries—the slaughter of vermin and the keeping out of evil spirits. The younger and lesser Sêns were washing the mousers. The old men and those of established influence were washing the “guardians.” Sên C’hian Fan himself was struggling with the temple cats.

Sên King-lo was not the only man of his blood who had gone afar and had sojourned in the West. Sên P’ei-yü, home-come but yesterday, had a Harvard degree; Sên T’sung had spent three years in Oxford and two in St. Petersburg. And two here had served the Manchu at European courts. Sên P’ei-yü still wore the Western garb he had journeyed in; he was not washing, and Sên T’sung smiled a little grimly as he bent over the almost boiling soap-suds in which he was rubbing and scrubbing a wild-eyed striped black-and-white that lashed his hands fiercely with her tail. It was the best fight she could put up, because she was securely muzzled and her feet were securely tied in thick socks; a precaution that had to be taken with several of the older and more embitt-

tered cats, lest human eyes pay the penalty of lost sight for the observance of an old custom.

Sên C'hian Fan was washing the most honorable and honored of all the hundred-odd, a mild-faced, venerable tortoiseshell, so imperially yellow that it was named "Palace Sun Flower," kept its state on a chain of gold at the foot of the Ancestral Temple steps, had a cushion to lie on, several cat assistants to keep watch and ward when Sun Flower slept, was pampered in diet, often caressed, wore a jewel in its left ear, and twice a day was let at large in the netted-over cattery-courtyard. But the mildest cat may turn. The Flower, turning his handsome leonine head suddenly to see how his friend and light o' love, a silver fiend named "Perversity," was enjoying her bath at the hands of Sên Tom Young, Sên C'hian Fan's sponge and hand slipped, almost blinding poor old Sun Flower with astringent soap; and Sên C'hian Fan's hand and arm ran with blood. The honorable Sun Flower-one was neither muzzled nor stockinged.

It was not the only scratch inflicted as the cleanly work went on; but the Sêns worked steadily.

If the castes of the Sên cats were few, their breeds were many—chinchillas, smokes (blue, silver and bronze), silver-flecked, cream-grays, and several more.

There was a terrible din of fire-crackers and drums. Noise is not quite so sure a driver-away of ill-spirits as old cats are, but it is the next best substitute, and wherever a cat was kept on its chain ordinarily, serving boys were lighting fire-crackers now and beating drums as fast and hard as they could.

If it could in no way be described as a leisurely function, without exaggeration it was a slow and long one. More than one Sên would feel the pangs of hunger before the last cat was washed and dried and restored to its vocation and chain.

If there were but the long cue of a hundred cats here, there

were four times a hundred tubs, sometimes. Each cat had its own tubs, and each cat had four; stout little tubs on four or six tough squat legs, each tub with two flat but spike-like handles standing opposite each other on its rim, in each handle a round hole through which ropes are threaded for convenience in carrying away when the good work is done.

Tub number one was the long-soak-and-first-scrub tub. It was filled with steaming hot water. "Cat" was immersed and held down—all but its nose, ears and eyes—for several minutes religiously measured by a diminutive hour-glass that stands on the bathman's low table of varied impedimenta. Then a strong hand rubbed a cake of strong soap—sometimes a ladle of softer and stronger soap—well into fur, skin and crevices. Cat's face was washed, a human thumb of a kneeling servant lad held over each angry eye to save it a painful soaping; washed with a well-soaped, thoroughly plied rag. Next the impatient sufferer was lifted out of tub number one and thrust firmly down into tub number two, a trifle larger, a trifle hotter, and all was done again. A good massaging the animal got this time from pungent soap and skillful fingers. Tub number three was the hot-water rinse-tub; a long immersion this time, and puss was tightly grasped by the back of its neck and its horrified head plunged in and out of the almost bubbling rinse water a number of times. Tub number four was filled with almost cold water, for anti-tuberculous reasons. The yells that went up from those cold water number four tubs shivered the ears of all who heard them; would destroy the hearing of ears less inured to the blasting noises of China.

But the worst is over. The well-washed cat is swathed in a hot towel from stacks ready on a brazier of red hot charcoal. Then number two hot towel, and cat gets such a rubbing as mere words cannot tell. When every hair is dry as a tinder, feet, claws and ears are attended to and eye corners are not

forgotten. The toilet of the ears is a terrible business; a careless pen stated prematurely that the worst was over.

But every sorrow has its end—even in the life of a cat in China.

Beside each table of tools and *et ceteras*, a great wicker cage awaits the completed toilet, and when a microscopic inspection—a search for parasites that, to do the Sên cats mere justice, rarely resulted in a find—had been followed by a prolonged combing, each cat was bolted in its wicker cage, the cages put in the sunniest places possible, and the Sêns, weary but triumphant, retired to their own tubs and a really needed, well-earned breakfast, while the attendants removed tubs, tables and all the soapy litter of the multiple feline toilets.

But that was still an hour or two in the future—and Chinese hours at that. Each hour has one hundred and twenty of our minutes.

The sun was rising in splotched and crimsoned splendor. The young pink and green leaves glistened softly on the beech and walnut trees that rimmed the great sweep of grass doing duty for bath-room. Birds began to tweet, then to sing.

An old, old monkey—but impish still and prankish—dangled from the tallest nut tree, jabbering and pelting cats and Sêns impartially with twigs and soft just-forming baby nuts. He aimed with fiendish exactitude, but none rebuked or complained, for Yam Sin had been the privileged toy of Sên Ya Tin, and since that Queen-one's going on-High had neither been chained nor punished.

Sên C'hian Fan spluttered an angry oath. Sun Flower had given him the slip; Sun Flower the great green-eyed, needle-clawed temple tortoiseshell. The huge beast was well-nigh as strong as a tiger-cub; suddenly it had wrenched and wriggled its soap-slippery body out of Sên's half-scalded and now half-numbed hands, plunged and hurled itself free of man and water, overturning its tub as it sprang, drenching Sên

C'hian Fan's feet, shoes, and quite a length of Sên's legs too, and splashing the man's face, eyes and nostrils with the soapy bath-water.

Then they raced—the cat and the man. The Sêns rocked with laughter—all but Sên C'hian Fan. Sên C'hian Fan's well-soaped shoes slipped on the wet, soapy grass; Sên slid, slipped—fell; measured his long length face-down on the soap-pooled ground. The first lap was Sun Flower's; nine score Sêns and twice as many servitors squealed a hurricane of glee.

Sun Flower flew towards the temple—the temple that Sên Ya Tin had builded to Sên King-lo.

Sên C'hian Fan sprawled up unsteadily and made after.

The onlookers were hushed and appalled.

If a cat entered the temple, the temple would be defiled, and from that the gravest disasters might be piled upon all the clan and crush it to the dust. Cats are the outer guardians of many holy places, but must not enter them.

All who dared leave their own immediate charges—the cats they were tubbing—ran pell-mell by twenty short cuts to head off Sun Flower, if they could, before he gained the temple steps; for that Sên C'hian Fan should overtake a cat going at such a pace and with such a start was palpably impossible. In their frantic eagerness to avert a great family disaster several had dragged the cats they were washing out of the water, and gave chase with soaped and squalling wet cats clasped to their manly breasts—in several instances a valor ill-rewarded, for more than one lost the wet puss he had so brashly extracted from its bath and that meant a bath all over again.

The cat won.

Sên dashed after him into the temple.

Again the cat dodged the man, hurtled out of the temple it had defiled, down the steps and up a lemon tree.



None followed Sên C'hian Fan into the temple—none might do that unless he, the head clansman, bade it.

Sên C'hian Fan lingered in the temple.

They made no doubt that he was burning prayer-papers and sticks to purge and purify, kneeling at the altar of Sên King-lo, whom Sên Ya Tin had so loved; propitiating and beseeching the gods to forgive the desecration; and they waited with bated breath and grave eyes to learn when he came to them again if the gods had vouchsafed some sign of their forgiveness.

They were wrong.

Sên C'hian Fan there in the temple had forgotten the very existence of Sun Flower, all thought of the peccant tortoise-shell blotted out in the sharpest amazement he ever had experienced.

He had approached the altar, as the cat scurried out, to make such atonement as he could. But as he stretched out his still wet hand toward the prayer box he started, stiffened, his outstretched hand fell to his side, his eyes were glazed in amazement.

A man lay fast asleep before the altar—a Chinese gentleman by his garb. Sên C'hian Fan could not see the face snuggled down on a plum-colored sleeve as on a pillow.

Then he saw the ring the sleeper wore—a signet of the Sêns, centuries old, an heirloom of great pride that Sên C'hian Fan knew—they all knew it—that Sên Ya Tin their queen old-one had given to her favorite grandchild.

And Sên C'hian knew that Sên Ruben the son of Sên King-lo had reached the homestead of his kindred—knew that Ruben the white Sên had come home to Ho-nan, for ill or for good.

## CHAPTER XXVI

SÊN C'HIAN FAN'S face softened.

He was not glad that Ruben had come, but he could hold no bitterness to the boy who, garbed so, slept so at the foot of a father's altar, who wore the signet of the Sêns on his hand—not at least until the stranger kinsman had earned bitterness.

Here in the temple that old Sên Ya Tin had builded to the father of Sên Ruben, Sên C'hian Fan could feel no rancor towards the young kinsman who had journeyed so far to do worship to a father, who had crept so untrumpeted to pray beside his father's tablet. The older Sên had no doubt that the boy had done that—and praying had fallen asleep, overcome by the weariness of long and arduous travel. A great heap of perfumed ashes in the ash-catcher of an incense burner, another such ash-heap and another, testified for Sên Ruben.

The Chinese heart of Sên C'hian Fan could not keep cold or hard to a kinsman young-one who had so proved his first of all the virtues, filial devotion; and in proving that had proved, too, his very Chineseness. The heart of the man watching the other as he slept might sour or harden to Sên Ruben under stress or rasp of future circumstance or discord—but not here, not now.

Perhaps Ruben felt his kinsman's presence—perhaps he had slept his sleep out. He rolled over, gave a sleepy sigh of contentment, and opened his eyes.

Blue English eyes and Chinese black eyes met—and locked. Sên C'hian Fan spoke first.

“Greeting!”

Ruben sprang to his feet, sprang up to make the salutations of respect and obedience to his elder and kinsman.

Sên C'hian Fan bowed in return to Sên Ruben.

"Thou art welcome, far-come one."

"Thy servant has come home, sir my lord," the boy said pleadingly but proudly.

Sên C'hian Fan smiled. "Come to thy rice, boy-one kinsman from beyond the edge of the world."

Sên C'hian knew that the earth we live on did not, firmly as his ancestors for centuries had believed that it did, end abruptly just beyond the Great Wall, just yonder over Nippon, a little south of Ind, a long throw west of Persia; but he chose to use speech of old days to his new-come kinsman.

How in all the devils had this pale-one contrived to enter their gates or scale their high walls; how contrived to find his way all undetected, undebarr'd, to the temple of Sên King-lo?

But he would not question him here. Already they had chattered more than was fit in the temple of a sacred tablet.

And he would question him of nothing until he had fed him. The traveler who had slept from great weariness must hunger for his rice. Sên C'hian Fan hungered for his and was minded to have it now; even if Wash-the-Cats was incomplete. One cat certainly would have to be washed all over again to-morrow! Well, let it. It was high rice-time now. Sên C'hian had done a hard day's work, young though the day still was; his hands bled, a rough scratch athwart his nose tingled uncomfortably; he needed the stimulant and refreshment of scalding tea, the reënforcement of snail-and-rice pancakes, the sedative and consolation of many pipefuls.

He took Ruben's hand in his own, and led him out, down the temple steps to where those gathered at the temple spirit-wall stood watching amazed and in consternation.

And some of the peasant-ones fell down on their faces, prostrating themselves half in fear, half in worship, thinking

that a spirit-one had come to them with Sên C'hian Fan from the temple of Lord Sên King-lo.

And Sên Ruben knew that the lord-one and *doyen* of their most noble tribe did him great honor, gave him high welcome, since Sên C'hian Fan led him hand-in-hand, hailed him and crowned his home-coming by the touch of flesh and flesh; an intimate token that even close kinsmen rarely—very rarely—give or brook.

None dared follow them, for Sên C'hian Fan had bade none do so as he and Ruben passed between the little human throng that parted at their coming. But twenty heads turned to watch them as they went, twenty tongues fell a-chattering as soon as C'hian Fan and his unaccountable companion had passed them. And the Sun Flower, crouched up on the old lemon tree, waved his tail to them as they went, an orange plume of victory; tauntingly at Sên C'hian Fan, and to Sên Ruben in defiance—or in greeting.

Devastated Wash-the-Cats was completed that day without the presence of the clan's headsman; most irregular!

And when they had bathed their hands and faces—C'hian's needed it the more—C'hian Fan and Ruben breakfasted alone in one of the smaller *k'o-tangs*, waited on ceremoniously by soft-footed, deft-handed house-servants, men and boys expressionless of face, but whose yellow bosoms were almost bursting with curiosity, whose thin small ears bent obsequiously to catch every word they could. What a Chinese house servant cannot hear when he really listens rarely is worth hearing.

There would be weird tales to tell and to hear to-night when the servants of the great household pulled their pipes in the courtyard in which they took their leisure—and chattered of their masters—telling each other of all the girdle-wearer ones had said and done all day long.

Host and guest faced each other across a small marble-topped table. Their seats were stools.

That they directly faced each other was a rudeness to Ruben. But the elder Sên believed that the ignorant one from across the seas would not know that; and it was easier to study the stranger's face seated so.

At first they said but little; C'hian Fan was hungry, Ruben after his long fast was famished.

But the man who was at home and accustomed here watched the other with devouring curiosity, although he did not appear to watch him.

But when a course or two—a dozen small bowls of heaped-up food and sauces to a course—had been removed, and their hunger a little appeased, Sên C'hian began to question, deeply curious to learn more of this unwelcome-one, and, too, because an interchange of questions is the preliminary politeness of every Chinese conversation. Interchange of thought, discussion of affairs or business may follow on—usually does to endless length of words—but questions and answers must have the first, and no short, place.

The more Sên C'hian Fan watched and listened the more he was puzzled. Where had this kinsman who had lived in the West until a few weeks ago learned to use Chinese words and Chinese chopsticks as if he always had used them? Sên King-lo had died in Sên Ruben's babyhood, and C'hian knew that Sên Ruby had neither liked nor adopted Chinese manners or customs. And Ruben knew the names of dishes that the older Sên was sure the other never could have eaten in Europe. He even knew how to answer Chinese questions, and to return them—the prescribed, stereotyped interrogations of Chinese politeness.

When at last he asked, Ruben told him; gave the credit where it was due.



"Kow Li—yes, I recall that one of our 'babies' followed Sên King-lo, your noble father, on all his wanderings. I think I have heard that Kow often writes even now to his family here—and that he prospers."

"He has prospered exceedingly," Ruben stated. "Li is a very rich man—and a staunch friend!"

"Many of our servants are that," C'hian replied both indifferently and cordially, accepting self-devotion as the gentle's merest right, but claiming it proudly as a race virtue.

"Can I see his family—his relatives?" Ruben asked. "I should like to greet them; and dear old Kow will like to hear of them from me—hear more than letters often tell—when I am back in London."

"What if I will not permit you to go back?"

Ruben smiled a question—what did his kinsman mean?

"In China it is the host who gives the guest leave to go, not the guest who takes it. He who comes unbidden may not go untold to go."

"Yes, I know. I have been taught that. But my mother wants me, cousin; and no Chinese will ask a son to overstay the liberty his mother has granted him."

"No Sên will!" C'hian Fan answered. "When must you leave us, Sên Ruben?"

"Long before the *ying su* moon, I fear."

Sên C'hian Fan devotedly hoped so! How soon, he wondered, would Sên Ruben demand to see the estate account-books, how soon demand his seventh share of all their wealth—his by right. One seventh! It would tear an ugly gap in their splendid fortune. And to have it taken out of China! China needed all her wealth now. Money was strength—the greatest, surest of all the international strengths—and the giant nation beset by all the pygmy peoples of jealous East and avaricious West needed strength as in all her smolder-

ing flaming history she never before had needed it. It was not in Sên C'hian Fan to be dishonest—it is in few Chinese; still less was it in him to repudiate an ancestral debt—that is in no Chinese. And on the death of Sên Ya Tin one-seventh of all the Sên fortune belonged to the estate of Sên King-lo. Sên C'hian Fan had no thought, no wish, to deny it. But he grudged that such potential power should go from China in this day of national factions, threatening civil war, alien encroachments and—as he saw it—stupendous and thievish trickeries.

However, Sên Ya Tin had charged them when she lay dying that one-seventh of their all was Sên King-lo's son's and should be given when he claimed it.

Did this pale, half-Chinese, half-Sên deem that they might dispute what indeed he might in this time of schism and transition find insuperably difficult to wrench from them against their will? Did Sên Ruben fear that it would take time, address, cajolery? Only so could C'hian Fan read it that the blue-eyed one thought to tarry here until such time as the cooling moons approached the frozen Poppy Month. Pah! Had the white half-Sên never heard of honor? Did not Sên King-lo's son know that Sên honor neither caviled nor flinched?

When would the English Sên speak? The sooner the better—speak, take, and go!

Sên C'hian's fine lacerated hand clenched on the ivory stem of the ginger help-spear as he pronged up the best lump of the ginger and thrust it into Ruben's bowl of chicken, rice and mushrooms.

“You can have speech of all the Kows when you will, most eminent cousin-one. I will bid them attend you when you will. Some of them are near, some farther off, at the edges of the domain; but it will not take many hours to fetch them to your heel. Kow Yong Shu, to whom Kow Li indites his

not altogether infrequent letters, is our head dog-keeper. There is little he knows to do beyond his office, I fear, but he is trustable and discreet, and you may care to attach him to your personal service while you are here."

"Nay, my honorable cousin, this person requires no servant here—save only the general service of the household attendants, if you grant it to him. I have come to be your servant, cousin, here in the house of our fathers. It is that I ask—that and to stay awhile here one of my own people, to live their life and share it, to see and know my homeland that I have loved and longed for since my birth day."

"That is what you wish?"

"That is what I ardently wish, Sên C'hian Fan. I have crossed the world for that; it is my soul's desire."

"And—what else?" The question slipped from Sên C'hian Fan before he could check it. He would have recalled it if he could. C'hian's teeth bit his tongue as he waited Sên Ruben's answer.

The answer was prompt. "Only that, nothing but that," Ruben said simply.

And Sên C'hian Fan did not believe Sên Ruben.

"When I am wedded—" Ruben began. He started a little, started more than a startled Chinese girdle-wearer should, as something rough and heavy fell imperatively on his shoulder. Ruben turned abruptly, more nearly turned his back upon his elder and kinsman than a Chinese gentleman under any circumstances should; turned and saw a bright brown bear sitting close beside him, sitting upright on its haunches, opening and closing its mouth in unmistakable appetite; staring at him gluttonously with its avid little eyes, its nostrils quivering, its tongue beckoning to Ruben's food-bowls hungrily.

Sên C'hian Fan was watching Ruben intently.

Ruben laughed.

"Hello, old bean!" he said in English.

Bruin growled at the unaccustomed speech—or perhaps at the easy mockery in the white man's voice.

But it did not reject the sugared sweetmeat Ruben gave it; and Sên C'hian Fan saw that the white hand did not flinch from the edge of the sharp-fanged drooling jaws; saw how confidently the younger Sên tweaked caressingly the beast's up-set pointed ear as it munched, one mean red eye cocked sharply on Ruben.

This stranger, who had come to spy and to despoil, was Sên-like, in some ways!

"You were about to tell me a thing of great interest and importance, when Lung Tin thrust his ugly snout into our conversation. You are affianced? And will wed, on your return to England, the distinguished English maiden of your lotus-like mother's selection! This kinsman, your poor and inadequate host, makes you his humble and ardent congratulation, honorable Sên Ruben."

"The gods forbid," Ruben exclaimed quickly. "I am not affianced, my venerable cousin and most indulgent host. When I am, my bride will be of my father's race. Believe me, O my cousin, I am Chinese for all that my bleached skin belies it; and rather will I die unwedded, to lie for all time unmourned in a dishonorable grave, a poor pariah of the hell underworld, than marry with any but a Chinese maid."

That might not be so easy, Sên C'hian Fan reflected cynically, especially if this human oddity had any thought of marriage with a maiden of repute and family, and it could not be gainsaid that he wore his robes and used his chop-sticks like a true sash-wearer. But etiquette forbade C'hian Fan the discourtesy of saying aloud that Sên Ruben might not find the first Chinese gentleman he approached eager to accept a son-in-law from the West.

But he did venture a question that his seniority and their kinship gave him full right to ask.

"You have seen the maiden you desire?"

"I have not met her—yet," Sên Ruben said softly.

Sên C'hian Fan was much puzzled.

When this other had denied that in coming to Ho-nan he had had no motive more ulterior than to visit the home of his father and of his ancestors, to see and know his Sên kindred, to take for a time his place, a Chinese in China, Sên C'hian Fan had not believed him. But the sincerity blazoned in the voice that had said, "My bride will be a Chinese maid," had rung its message through to Sên C'hian Fan. C'hian Fan knew that Sên Ruben meant it.

And Ruben appeared to worship his mother; and C'hian remembered how little King-lo's English wife had liked China and ways Chinese! How would she welcome a Chinese daughter-in-law?

Sên C'hian Fan was very puzzled—so puzzled that he thrust his fingers in the rinse-cup, and lifted the soaked, steaming towel to his lips before his guest had used either of his.

## CHAPTER XXVII

**L**A-YUÊN had taken no part in Wash-the-Cats, nor had watched it. Such things were nothing to her now. Only the Feast of Lanterns lured her now, of all China's fairyland, jeweled functions, and it only because she knew that Sên Po-Fang came back to Ho-nan then, and that his spirit was near her when the scintillating great dragon, eagerly chasing the Pearl-of-Perfection, snorted out its fire-stars and *rugie*. But for it, functions were husks to La-yuên the widowed concubine.

Her children were dead—her babe whom Sên Ruby had played with, and her babe she had borne her dead lord.



When Sên Po-Fang had died, La-yuên his concubine had died too!

But a woman can die—lose all appetite for life and for life-things—and yet hold her friendships. There are such women and La-yuên was one. One may perish in self and yet one's loyalty live on, for true loyalty cannot die. There are many such Chinese.

Loyalty to her lord's house bade her serve Sên Ruben. Loyalty to the will of Sên Ya Tin commanded it. For Lord King-lo's wife, the white Lady Ruby, La-yuên the young and happy concubine, radiant in her lord's favor and in his number-one's, radiant in her girl-motherhood, had felt a peculiar friendship, tender, respectful, protective, as Chinese servitors so often do for those over them. There are no class hatreds in China—unless we have brought and taught them. Moreover, La-yuên in those bygone days had pitied what she had clearly seen was Sên Ruby's loneliness, aloofness, discontent in the house of her husband; and the lady Sên Ruby had sent gracious words and rich gifts to La-yuên from Hong Kong when King-lo and his wife were sailing back to the West—gifts of garments and baubles that had seemed ten times gracious and rich to the concubine because the giver had worn and used them. And La-yuên's gratitude held.

The woman had taken some risk in admitting strange Sên Ruben surreptitiously into the homestead. But personal risk of her own was nothing to the seared woman; had it been much, La-yuên would have taken far more bitter risk than that for the son-one of Sên Ruby, the White Rose of China.

She busied herself in the house and courtyards. There was enough for willing spare hands to do when almost all were gathered to do, or to serve or to watch, Wash-the-Cats; and always La-yuên was willing to work—for the Sêns. She had parted with joy, but she clung to service, and found it an almost pleasant bridge from Now to Hereafter.

Wash-the-Cats did not interest her. The welfare and order of larder and *k'o-tang* did. And when she had done all she could find for her care—all of the myriad this-and-thats of housewifery and supervision, as perpetual and imperative for human home comfort in China as in Christendom—she fetched her spinning-wheel into the dove's courtyard, scattered their corn, lit two notched candles, shielded from any stray puff of air that might come, and sat her to spin.

It was not dark, or even dim, in the courtyard; the sun was up; La-yuên needed no light beyond what the glowing day-star gave her. The candles were her timepiece—the common timepiece of old conventional China. Each notch, when the candle was lit, told that an hour's quarter had been burnt up—thirty minutes as time is told at Greenwich. Frugal as the Chinese are, they usually light twin candles on shop counter or home casement, when they light candles for clocks, that their track of time shall not be lost, should by any accident one candle be extinguished. And La-yuên lit her brace of clocks because such accidents, take what precaution you may, inexplicably do happen now and then.

When the Hour of the Snake had come, she laid down her spindle, and rose to keep her tryst with Sên Ruben; to show him a way from the temple and out of a tree-shrouded gate, helping him to go as he had come, secretly and unsuspected, that he might return in more circumstance to greet his kindred, and to ask greeting and welcome of them.

All others that were not ill or imperatively held to work in the house, or far off in the estate, would be at Wash-the-Cats. By the route she would lead Sên Ruben, none would see him.

La-yuên had counted without Sun Flower the meek-faced, tiger-like tortoise-shell.

In the temple doorway she paused, and looked toward the tablet-altar. It was there that Lord Sên Ruben would be

waiting for her, keeping his vigil in its filial sacredness to its last instant.

Sên Ruben was not there.

The woman paled.

She searched the temple anxiously, searched it repeatedly, though where she could expect to find him, when she did not instantly see him, were hard to say. The lovely prayer-room was not vast and its exquisite, priceless furnishings were few. There was not a coign there where a human body much smaller than Sên Ruben's could hide or be hidden. The largest object the temple held—a great incense burner of Satsuma, crystal and gold—would not have screened or confined a man half his size.

Sên Ruben was not there!

Had he gone? Or had he been found and dragged away?

Where was Sên Jo Hiêsen; where was An Pin? But she knew that they both were at Wash-the-Cats, were at it hard.

Who had done this thing?

What had befallen Sên Ruben the son of Sên King-lo?

Trembling and shivering she left the temple, searched frantically about its garden, its courtyard, its marble steps and carven terraces, searched among the lemon-trees, searched everywhere, no place within many rods too improbable for her now frenzied fear to investigate.

Alack! Not here, not there!

She would to P'wing Nog; only P'wing Nog could help her now, the *hsien-jen* who lived in the cave in the sulphur-hill, and who knew all things—and could tell them, if he would.

P'wing Nog should tell her where and how was Sên Ruben. She would make P'wing Nog tell her—only the gods knew how. But nothing should hide Sên Ruben from her, or keep him from her succor and service.

Fast as her binded feet and her beating heart would let her, she sped down the birch-lined path, through ferns, over violet beds just pimpled shyly with hooded baby buds. For all that is said of such feet (deformities not to be defended—though probably less injurious than Western footgear sometimes is) La-yuên had been lapwing gaited once, and still had fleet pace when she chose.

Almost breathless, but toddling on valiantly and rapidly, she reached the avenue of crab-apple trees, turned the twisted path's corner sharply, checked herself and her running with a little quickly smothered cry of surprise and relief just in time to escape colliding with a friendly party of three walking slowly toward the gold-fishes' alabaster tank.

Sên C'hian Fan and Lord Sên Ruben were speaking together gravely, but unmistakably their speech was amiable, and Sên Ruben was walking in the place of honor on C'hian Fan's left hand, and Sên Ruben's left hand rested companionably on Lung Tin's shaggy coat. Lung Tin waddling with much dignity and pressed as close as he could against his new friend-and-patron's silk-clad flank, Sên Ruben accepting and caressing the spoilt tame bear who had been the chief minor torment of Sên Ruby's Ho-nan ordeal!

La-yuên bowed, almost knelt, as she drew aside for C'hian Fan and his companion.

Ruben half-checked his pace, but the woman's eyes before they fell meekly to the ground warned and implored him to give her no hint of recognition, and she gave him none.

"Whither goest thou so hastening?" C'hian demanded.

"To the eel pond, eminent Sên C'hian Fan."

"Thou liest," C'hian laughed. "Coming from it mayhap, but thou art not going to it, not as thy lilies ran."

"First I go to the flax-shed—but for a no-length moment. Then go I to the pool of the eel-ones," the concubine retorted, minding her points of the compass more astutely this time.

Lung Tin turned his head and growled at her insolently. La-yuên cuffed him soundly on his pointed ear.

Sên C'hian Fan threw her a kindly gesture, Lung Tin growled more discreetly; and they went their ways, La-yuên towards the flax-shed until she was from their view, the men and the bear on to the gold-fish tank, Ruben a little flushed with guilt and remorse that, in his joy at his kinsman's gracious welcome, and in spite of such unceremonious arrival, he had quite forgotten the woman and that she was to seek him in the temple when the Hour of the Snake was ripe.

And what, he wondered, should he say in explanation, if Sên C'hian Fan questioned him about how he had found his way to the temple, how gained over the homestead's walls, or through one of its close-kept gates?

He would not lie to the Sên who had received and welcomed him—fed him but now. He would not betray the concubine who had befriended and indulged him.

It was a poser!

## CHAPTER XXVIII

VERY slowly, but quite surely, Ruben won them—won even Sên Jo Hiêsen and the servitor who had begged to be sent to Hong Kong to assassinate the English intruder. Of them all, only An Pin never quite “took to” him—the phrase is as current in Ho-nan as it is in Dublin and Chicago. That one dislike persisted in direct descent of La-yuên's smack far more than it existed against Sên Ruben himself.

There were days when Ruben Sên was homesick for England. You can't nursery a boy, half English by blood to start with, in a Surrey garden, “breech him,” as it were, at Eton, give him his fresh young manhood at Cambridge, and thrust him across the world, and leave him alone in China



for the most of a year—in a Chinese domain in far Ho-nan where few others even thought of Europe, where English news rarely came, and never an English book or newspaper—and have him take firm and satisfied root at once. Ruben Sên did take root, but in rooting there in the home of his people he had twinges of “growing pain”—some of them sharp ones. Not even China can quite wipe England out from the thought and longing of one who has lived in England as Ruben had. It seemed to him preposterous not to know whether his 'Varsity or the Oxford crew had won the race. He missed his mother and he wondered and worried a good deal about Ivy.

But, on the whole, he was happier here in China than he ever had been before, for he knew that he should find *her* some day, and his young masculine heart was confident that he should win her. And he knew also that but for his mother he never would leave Ho-nan again; not even for Ivy.

There were difficulties in his stay here, of course, his in-growth in so unaccustomed a human environment. And there were social and personal quicksands that might have engulfed him, and might have divorced him entirely from the kin of his with whom he so earnestly wished to amalgamate. Kow Li had done wonders, but not even that astute and devoted “baby”—the old Chinese millionaire of Bloomsbury who after almost his lifetime of exile was fanatically Chinese—could give to the eager and quick-minded half-caste what thousands of years and cultured establishment, sacrosanct family conventions and, most potent of all, natural environment had given to the Sêns here in Ho-nan.

But La-yuên, the widowed concubine who neither could read nor write and did not know that China was a republic—or know what a republic was—constituted herself his mentor, philosopher and slave and kept near him always when she could—so unobtrusively that the Sêns scarcely noticed it.

And La-yuên steered him past the snags and drew him away from the quicksands. Sên Ruben was the white son of her adoption and love, the last love of her loyal life. She guarded him at every point, and, although he never knew it, curbed and prompted him constantly.

For instance: Ruben never knew that it was something that La-yuên had said, as she knelt in the aviary path one day dusting the earth and the dew from his shoes with her sleeve, that caused him to say to Sên C'hian Fan, as they sat smoking in the moonlight among the musk-roses and globe-flowers that ran perfumed riot all over the marble terrace that circled the apricot hill, "What a wealth of heritage—this!"

So! It was coming at last. Well—he had known it would come; and it was but just, and the law, that it should.

"I knew that my father's people were very rich, that their holding here in Ho-nan was almost a kingdom—"

"It is a kingdom, Sên Ruben. Every great patriarchal Chinese home-place is that," C'hian Fan interpolated quietly.

"Oh—yes," Ruben agreed, "and in a way and to an extent that even a Chinese who was born and always has lived in the West and largely among Westerns could not understand until he came back home."

"Home? You mean *here*, Sên Ruben?"

"Assuredly. This is my home, Sên C'hian Fan, as truly, as deeply as it is yours. But I again must leave it, go back to exile, as my father did. I marvel that he chose to live so long in exile; wonder and wonder *why* he did. But for me it is the only path; the road my feet must walk and keep to while my mother lives. I beg all the gods that my exile may be long; but if my mother goes before me to the spirit of noble Sên King-lo on-High, then will I come back to Ho-nan, and keep my old years and my burial in this our home."

"Widow-ones re-wed in England, I have heard, and that it is held not dishonorable to do so there."

"That is truth. But my lily-mother will not wed again."

"Art sure?"

"Quite sure, I thank all the gods. And I would choose to go on-High hand-in-hand with her, leaving my sons to mourn and worship at our graves; would so choose it that she need not cross the cold death-lake alone, or journey alone into the under forest until my jade-like father meets and greets her. But if so the gods do not grant it, then will I return to Honan; nor will I come empty-handed; my father left a not mean fortune—half mine when I shall be orphaned; not wealth perhaps matched with thine—but still a sum that not even the coffers of the Sêns could despise. What is our wealth here, Cousin? It would give me pride to know, if you could name it."

C'hian smiled. He did not doubt it!

"Sên Yung-lin can tell you that better than I can—in terms of money, Sên Ruben. Yung-lin is our accountant. He will go through the books and deeds whenever you choose that he should do so. Roughly—but in this disrupted China of to-day it will be difficult to put a firm value on anything that is not actual money, and not even that by any money standard of yours, because the *yuan* is so disestablished and fluctuating in sterling exchange—roughly, as nearly as I can guess it, our fortune to-day—land, claims, interests, shares, money, jewels, other treasures, buildings, crops stored and growing, and all altogether—is not less than seventy million *yuan*, growing towards much more than that amount if this present threatening of civil war comes to nothing, and provided China is developed not on insane chimerical lines but on sane lines and on sound foundations."

"Seventy million *yuan*! About seven or eight million pounds! What a fortune! Splendid! By the way, C'hian Fan, it is cackled in the courtyards—and I hate to be so

wronged in the courtyards of Sên Ya Tin—that I have come to claim my seventh share in the family wealth.”

“I supposed you knew the law—and the family practice,” C’hian said smoothly.

“Oh! Yes, I know that much of Chinese law. I have had a good tutor, Cousin C’hian Fan.”

“So did I suppose it. But I am not sure that you could enforce it—the old Chinese law of equi-distribution—in this new Republic of China.” C’hian Fan laughed as he spoke, but he was watching Ruben’s face more narrowly than he showed.

“But that does not matter,” Ruben laughed back.

“It does not matter,” Sên C’hian Fan said gravely. “We shall not repudiate your claim; you will not need to urge it. The edicts of Sun Yat-sen and the edicts of Tsao Kun are nothing to us, not theirs nor any other upstart’s; but the family laws of our great clan hold, and we obey and honor them.”

“You!”—Ruben’s voice cracked in his surprise and hurt—“Sên C’hian Fan, you! *You* have not harbored that thought? Tell me that you could not! Oh—forgive me, Sên; you were laughing at me—laughing at me that I cared what foolish idle women-ones chattered in their courtyards—and I deserved it. I would have battered in the face of any man-one who had said or thought it; but one should not feel anything at the follies of serving women. You were ‘pulling my leg’ as we say in England.”

“It sounds a Western expression,” C’hian Fan remarked silkily. Why did this white-faced stripling hide behind the peacock so; did he expect them to offer his heritage to him, entreat him to accept it, force him to take it? If he did, he had mistaken his kinsmen. Sên C’hian Fan would not smooth his way for him! Did this young, beardless one think to cross

wits with *the* Sên, blind him with willow leaves! A half-Chinese outwit in indirection a Chinese whose beard was gray!

Then—suddenly—Sên C’hian Fan thought of Sên Ya Tin on her death mat, and of what had been her last commandment as she rigored in the death-angel’s clutch. And—“I do not see,” he said gravely, “why you should not wish to have what is yours, Sên Ruben, why you should not take it—even if you do not need it. Wealth has the heartier appetite for wealth, the world over, I have heard; of a certainty it is so in China.”

Sên Ruben’s fair face flamed, his blue eyes glinted like rapiers. “I see!” he said fiercely. “That I am rich, in England, has nothing to do with it; I agree with you there. If I were here practically a beggar and without one cash beyond my journey-money back to my mother, I would not take so much as a ‘shoe’ from China—not a *yuan*—not a brass cash. It is not that I would not take from you, from the family, what I know is my rightful share, if I might stay in Ho-nan; it is that I will not rob China. Never will I take one piece of Chinese money into the West.”

“We should not miss it, Ruben,” the older Sên said oddly.

“China would miss it—or lack it. China needs her all now, and more. I will not rob China’s birthright of my birthright. The West will bleed her white unless she has a care, Sên C’hian Fan. It has made my blood boil to see some of our treasure filched, and held in Europe; ivories, pictures, bronzes, silks, needleworks, locked in Western museums, decking English merchants’ houses, bartered for across the counters of London shops. It has angered and hurt me, my cousin—one; now to see it again when I go back will be unendurable.”

Sên C’hian Fan saw the moisture that had gathered in Ruben’s wide blue eyes. And Sên C’hian knew that Sên Ruben had spoken sincerely.



But, being Chinese, a great generosity quickened and swelled in C'hian Fan in answer to Ruben's, in emulation of Sên Ruben's. And he urged, eagerly, sincerely, what but a few moments ago had seemed to him a catastrophe and unfairness and to be avoided if Chinese honor—and a Sên's—could.

"Hear me, I charge thee, Sên Ruben whom I love well, whom I honor with great and tender honor. I am the chief of all our house. I speak to you for our noble ancestors, and I speak to you with the voice of our old holiest, the incomparable Sên Ya Tin. It was her wish that the share of eminent Sên King-lo never should be deviated from the fruitage of his loins. We must not disregard her wish or disobey it. I dare not; you must not—lest disaster fall on all our house, our ancestors be disennobled, our graves desecrated. What Sên Ya Tin spoke must be!"

"Hear me now, O Sên C'hian Fan, kinsman and headman whom I love and honor humbly." Sên Ruben, sitting a little lower on the sloping sward, turned on his stool and laid his hand with an impulsive boyish gesture more English than Chinese on his cousin's silk sleeve. "Even because I so revere her jeweled memory, and because I love her—the very thought of her—for her goodness to my mother, I dare disobey our great old-one Sên Ya Tin the Queen of Sênland. *I disobey her.* In this thing I disobey her now and always. Already before her passing did she give great wealth to my father; she favored him beyond strictness of balance when she willed him also one full seventh. Let that pass; Sên King-lo, who would have had it otherwise, brooked it—brookd the great gifts of Sên Ya Tin, and it is not for me to cavil at them. But he held them in trust for China always; Sir Charles Snow, of whom I have told you—"

"An honorable gentleman," C'hian said, "he is held high in China."

"He has told me that over and beyond the great provision that Sên King-lo made for my mother, and the good dower he locked for my sister, he intended all he had to flow back to its home-source—here in the queendom of Sên Ya Tin. Even when I was a babe-one he sensed that, in spite of my long nose and colorless skin, I his son was *all Chinese*. He expected me to live and work for China—" and Ruben believed it. Sir Charles had faltered from telling Ruben uselessly that Sên King-lo had feared to have Ruben go to China; had believed it useless because he saw that Ruben *would* go. "He augmented all that his own father left to him, and all the great pouring of Sên Ya Tin's golden largesse. By Sên law—sacred to you and to me—one-seventh of all here is mine. Keep it for me, cousin-one and headman. I forbid that a *yuan* of it journey—as I must—from our own country. Keep it for me to thrive and wax here, or to be spent for China's preservation. I will come for it, or send my sons for it; not to take or dissipate it, but to nurse and pile on to it, when I come again to live with mine own people in my old age, as now in my youth I long to, or send my sons to take their place here in service of our family and of China. Haply, I may visit you again, crave again your love and welcome, bringing my bride with me to dwell a time in the courtyards of our women. I dream it—I pray the gods to grant it."

Sên C'hian Fan longed to question Sên Ruben of that bride of whom he spoke so softly—almost as if he held her hand in the early morning time of marriage. But he could not. The look in Sên Ruben's blue eyes lifted to the jeweled lace-work of the myriad many-colored stars that hung sparkling over the moon-silvered bamboos and varnish trees checked and hushed him of it.

"Come when you come, always you shall have my love and

welcome, Sên Ruben," he said softly, "the love and welcome of your home and kindred. Yah! Here comes Sên Jo Hiêsen and his face is heavy."

## CHAPTER XXIX

SÊN JO HIESEN was yet for Ruben's winning; and Ruben did not win Sên Jo Hiêsen so quickly or so simply.

They both saw—as the old man limped to them—that he was troubled and agitated.

He took no notice of Sên Ruben, unless an added frown of displeasure at not having instant speech alone with C'hian Fan, and he returned C'hian's greeting as quickly and curtly as might one who, though older, was but of a collateral branch of the family of which C'hian Fan was the head.

"It has come!"

"The new dwarf-tree?" C'hian asked lazily.

"War has come!"

Sên C'hian Fan took Jo Hiêsen's news lightly. "There always is war in China somewhere. Which of the brigand *tuchuns* are beating their drums now, venerable Old-one? Sit and share our smoking. The night is exquisite, and the perfumes from the gardens are intoxicating."

Jo Hiêsen huddled down on to the ground with great dignity, but he would not smoke.

"This is the great war—the great war that has been bound to come ever since the Son of Heaven was made unable to do the Spring-time Worship at the Temple of Heaven. A sea of blood rises from Pechilli to beyond the Jade Gate and down to Shanghai harbor, from Shangtung Promontory to Yunan. Fire kindles in every province, a conflagration that threatens to burn up all China."

Sên C'hian Fan laughed—but Sên Ruben was listening eagerly and his young blood pounded in its veins, jumping angrily through his heart.

"They but dice, Old-one," C'hian murmured across his long pipe-stem. "Sun Yat-sen is a warrior on paper. Trickery is his artillery. Feng Yu-hsieng, Wu Pei-fu, Chang Tsolin, Tsao Kun, Li Ching-lin and all the rest of them will cancel out in battles—mock warfare, much of it—and then shake their hands at each other in salutation, each claim the victory, share the spoils, and get back to their *yamêns* to fatten and scheme afresh till the next war is ripe. Let war come; it will go. And China would lack a pastime, the markets and street corners lack for gossip if strolling-player warriors did not pitch their tinseled booths here and there and give their usual dramatic performance at due and convenient times. They have a saying in England, our cousin here has told me, a saying of political astuteness and social precaution—'Do not rob the working man of his beer drink.' Who would rob our 'babies' of their raree-shows? Not I."

"You speak the folly of earless and sightless indifference," Jo Hiêsen wailed bitterly. "I tell you, Sên C'hian Fan, this is no dice-throwing between two or three yên grabster mandarins. *This is war!* Such war as the West counts war. China is in flame, and every country in the West, anxious to filch our land and undeveloped resources, is pouring petrol on to the flaring burning. Shall the Sons of Han pass from history worms discredited, because the girdle-wearers sit dreaming in the moonlight, lute-playing in their courtyards while the Son of Heaven's kingdom perishes, and is divided among barbarian peoples? I go to the war, Sên C'hian Fan! Keep you with your women?"

"I will keep me with my senses—and keep them in me," C'hian answered pleasantly. He had heard Jo Hiêsen rave and splutter before.

But the younger listener was well fired by Jo's vivid words.

"What hast thou heard, what message has reached our gates? May I know, venerable, eminent Sên Jo Hiêsen?" Ruben begged.

"Enough to make a tame-tit show fight! Shantung is arming, Kiangsu has armed. Wu Pei-fu has flung his challenge in the face of Feng Yu-hsieng. Peking is threatened."

"It often is," C'hian Fan chuckled. "The shopkeepers of Peking have a great deal to put up with. If Peking's walls are breached—more like by coin-bribery than by guns or arrows—the Sacred prisoner will not be molested, nor will the foreign Consulates. The Boxers gave us taste enough of what that consequented. A few shop-streets will be looted, a few merchants impoverished. It is not enough to draw me from the pleasant moonlight, Jo Hiêsen; nothing to mute the lutes in Ho-nan. Since when have Sêns fallen to the low caste of soldiers? Thou always wast warlike: a splendid spirit, Jo, but a low trade only fit for coolies. By-the-passing, which faction join you, my General; Feng's or Wu's, or go you to soldier in the cohorts of Sun Yat-sen?"

Jo Hiêsen let that last insult pass. Sên C'hian Fan knew that none of Sên blood would fight under the banner of Sun the regicide.

"Come then, give it," C'hian continued genially, more to humor the ardent old graybeard bursting to tell, than because he cared to hear, "what hast thou gathered? How came it? Who brought it?"

"Lo Mian-go has sent a runner to his kinsman, Lo Fing Nee, at Nan Yang, sent a runner from Hwai-king Fu, and by Mian-go's command the *tingchai* flung a letter-packet to me as he passed. This it said, the letter-packet of our pure and rich friend Lo Mian-go:—" And Sên Hiêsen plunged into such a spluttered jumble of scrappy and contradictory "war" news, and of names new to Ruben that Sên Ruben



could make but little out of it. According to Jo Hiêsen they all were cut-throats but not anxious to risk the slitting of their own throats—out to fill their own pouches rather than to do any service of patriotism. And C'hian Fan's indolent comment, when at last Jo Hiêsen paused for breath, rather echoed Ruben's thought.

"Patchwork!" C'hian Fan said scornfully. "No clear outline, little substance, twenty heads, flabby following; no definite plan, no true cause, no motive fine or great; more drums than bannermen! War! Nay, Jo Hiêsen; not war—bonfires, scattered bonfires."

Sên Jo Hiêsen was too angry to speak at once, and before he could, C'hian Fan went on, more gravely, turning on his stool squarely towards Jo Hiêsen. The moonlight showed C'hian's fine face like a lemon-tinted cameo, and something of the sharp starlight sparkled in his handsome eyes.

"Which of these mushroom generals would you join, which of them could your conscience support, which your taste belly? Who are they? *What* are they? We know what several of them are. China cries out for her 'strong man'—needs him sorely. I grant that. When he comes I will serve him. No moonlight shall hold me back then, nor hold my son-ones, nor any music in the courtyard, nor our women. And in all our *kuei* there is not a Sên woman who would seek to. Soldiering is a low base trade—and so will I have none of it, but when it is indeed a patriotism, selfless and sacrificial, then is it work for nobles; and then will I soldier until I fall in the battle, wash the spear of a foe with the heart's blood of a Sên. When China's strong man comes will I follow him. Has he come? Will he come? It is written on the parchments of the gods—but we cannot read it yet. Which is he, can you tell me? Not Wu Pei-fu. Not Chang Tso-lin. Not the traitor mountebank that has boasted 'I dethroned the Manchu with my sword.' Perhaps Feng Yu-

hsiang. Time and Feng will show. It may be he. But he must prove it. Let him prove it. Much points him the strongest in manhood, character and ability since Yuan Shih Kai. But is he fighting to make himself *Tuchun* of Pechilli, and after Emperor of China if he can compass and steer it? And better that than what we have! Or fights he to restore the rightful Son of Heaven on the Dragon Throne? Prove he so, and Sên C'hian Fan will be his humblest squire, be his servant."

C'hian had shaken Sên Jo Hiêsen, damped his fire. But Jo Hiêsen was warlike, and rarely in all his long life had gray-bearded Sên Jo Hiêsen eaten any word he once had spoken.

"I go to the war," he repeated almost sulkily.

"I will go with you, estimable Sên Jo Hiêsen."

"Why?" Jo Hiêsen and C'hian Fan exclaimed in a breath.

"I have lived too long where soldiering is thought not ill of, but highly honored and ranked, to be able to feel that the soldier's is not a splendid life. And I cannot idle at home when aged Sên Jo Hiêsen my venerable kinsman goes him to the wars. I must serve my country even with my life!"

"As a man should—a Sên man above others," C'hian Fan told him, "serve his country with his life. That is the service that counts; is a sweetness in the nostrils of the gods. But you propose to serve it with your death. That is no service for a noble to render, except at great and sure necessity, Sên Ruben. Leave bonfires to peasant mercenaries."

Death is not often mentioned in China. The fact is—for how can talk of life avoid it?—but not the word. The word itself is taboo or circumambulated. But Sên C'hian Fan was stirred—and he spoke to stir. He did not intend that Sên Ruben should perish in unworthy bandit warfare; sooner than that he would spoil the law of hospitality and would bar Sên Ruben fast in their house and courtyards. He

would chain Sên Ruben before he should follow mad Jo Hiêsen into death-trap ambush.

For C'hian had little doubt that the decrepit dotard would hobble off to the fray, and reach it, if he could. And probably Jo Hiêsen could—in a palanquin.

### CHAPTER XXX

**B**UT neither Jo Hiêsen nor Sên Ruben went a-warring. Several of C'hian Fan's predictions were fulfilled, before either graybeard or stripling had quite decided which of the several Chinese armies of the moment to join.

Intermittent and contradictory shreds of war-news trickled in. Thousands of Ho-nanese mercenaries marched off to do battle in the battalions of Wu Pei-fu fighting against Chang Tso-lin at Hangchow and in Kiangsu. Sên Jo Hiêsen cackled of it proudly, and Sên C'hian Fan gave his full approval. Ho-nanese soldiers are by long odds the best in China—best in valor, best in soldierliness, best in discipline; and C'hian was glad to have them show the world their prowess and reap their war pay, if they could collect it, so long as no sash-wearers and above all no Sêns went with them. Then the wind of policy blew the war flame out, a president resigned, a general lost his corps and his head, two were banished, Western journals lost a topic of which they had made the most, and every one shook hands with or at each other—according to whether they were old-school or modern. C'hian Fan had as little faith in the sudden peace as he had had in the civil war it quelled; but he saw no necessity of saying so. And even Jo Hiêsen was content to smoke once more the long-stemmed pipe of peace, and to fall back again into a subsidiary place in the councils and doings of the family.

But Sên Jo Hiêsen remembered how Ruben's face had

glowed, how the young blue eyes had lit as Ruben had vowed that he too would go to the wars, he too fight—and, if it chanced, die—for China.

Jo Hiêsen sometimes chatted with Ruben now, and pleasantly; advised him upon the advantages of concubinage, and gave him freely for his very own an old blind frog upon which the graybeard doted. It had dined and slept with him for years, and spent most of its waking hours in the old man's sleeve or on his shoulder. Ruben accepted it with effusive gratitude, and contrived to return it with great delicacy a few days later, with apparent reluctance, on the moving plea that the frog-one was pining for its beloved master. There were other reasons—and they were, at least equally, as true. But Sên Ruben did not state them. And all three were pleased at the humane reversion—the two Sêns and the frog-one.

And Sên Ruben had won Sên Jo Hiêsen. It would have gone ill with any who spoke ill of Sên Ruben, voluntary soldier and tender friend of frogs.

For all he had scoffed at it, the recent "war" stayed longer in C'hian Fan's thought than it did in Ruben's or in Jo Hiêsen's. The old-one, flash-in-the-pan-tempered, had not always a retentive memory, and a heaven-sent bolt from the blue drove all warfare and other ugliness far from the thought of young Sên Ruben.

Loyal, stubbornly loyal as the rule of Sên C'hian Fan was to all the old ways of China, and cordially as all the clan agreed with him in it, Sên Ruben was not shut out of the women's "flowery" quarters, but was made as free of them as Sên Ya Tin's will had made Sên King-lo when he had brought his English wife to their homestead. In fact, men of the blood often are fairly free of the women's quarters in such Chinese homesteads. The prohibitions of consanguinity are so imperious and so adamant and so far-reaching that they relax and permit almost as much as they forbid. Like a

Carmelite convent (though not like it in much else) a Chinese harem is not a prison but a sanctuary.

Ruben had formed almost instant friendship with Sên No Fee, the youngest and only unmarried daughter of Sên Kai Lun, a gay and saucy beauty, somewhat overdue for marriage, since she was sixteen, but still her father's close companion because she willed it, and very much his tyrant.

No and Ruben went together where they would within the wide walls; fished and hawked and chattered. More than once the minx told Ruben that, if only he were not her cousin, and his poor colorless face less hideous, she would have married him, and Ruben had retorted that he required a tame wife, not a colt-wild one, a wife of dignity and sweetness.

But he loved his cousin right well; and long tales he told her of Europe when she questioned him, which was often. Little laughing Sên No Fee had more approval of the new Chinese dispensation (of which she knew little but had heard much from girls more traveled) than had any other of these Ho-nan Sêns.

Ruben found her a glorious playmate; and she distinctly had a look of Ivy—a lesser beauty but oddly like.

No was an ignorant little thing, but she could beat him at chess without half trying, and her wits were as nimble as her education was scanty. All the pretty arts of Chinese courtyard ladies she had at her tiny fingers' tips, but she was proficient in none of them—nor keen to ply them. Sên No Fee was a tomboy; her heart, Ruben found, as warm as her manners often were naughty.

More than once they raced together hand-in-hand up and down the Hill-of-the-Cherry-Trees. That they did it hand-in-hand was scandalous, which was what sweetened it to Sên No Fee; but in spite of that her wee fingers tingled disagreeably when Ruben clasped them closely in his, lest her scraps of binded feet stumble and throw her as they ran. Holding



hands, which she did because she ought not, in itself was disagreeable to the Chinese girl, so deeply had the centuries drilled her that her hands were not for any other's touching. Ruben had romped and tussled too often with his sister Ivy in their Surrey garden to think much about it. But he too knew that in China it was forbidden; and he was young enough and masculine enough not to like it the less for that!

He wrote and told his mother what a ripping good sport his cousin No was, how much he liked her, and that thanks to her he soon would be able to hold his own with most of the other Sêns when they flew their kites on the flat crest of the long persimmon hill, so given over to that manly pastime that it was called Fly-the-Kites Hill. And many of No's confidences to him Ruben repeated to his mother in the long letters he wrote constantly, and started off to her by a runner to the treaty port post-office beyond the borders of Ho-nan as often as he could.

## CHAPTER XXXI

IF No Fee was a resource and a pal, she was a good deal of a nuisance, too, at times. She not only wanted her own way always—Ruben had known many girls and others who were not girls who did that—but invariably No Fee took it; sometimes she took it much to his inconvenience. Often she kept him away from his kinsmen when he wished to be with them. He loved Sên No Fee; he had to, for the girl was sweet and full of charm, and again and again she reminded him of Ivy. But he had not come to China to play cat's cradle, to chase butterflies, or to do tomboy things with a girl. He had come there to steep himself in its ways—the ways of its manhood, not in the softer ways of a *kuei*—and to asso-

ciate with the men of his family, to be a Sên with the Sên men.

Of all his Ho-nan kindred he most loved Sên No Fee, but to love and to like are two quite different things, and it was Sên Toon whom he most liked, with whom he best liked to be, and from whom as a Sên of his own generation and much of his own age he wanted to learn the intimacies of Chinese customs and thought. Toon had spent two years at Yale, and, although Ruben had come to Ho-nan soaked in the history and spirit of China, there was much he longed to learn and to realize that he found easier to grasp through this kinsman, who could give it to him in more or less Western terms as well as in the more intricate and indirect twists and turns of Chinese expression. Sên Toon had liked the West, thought it a jolly nice as well as a jolly queer place; and that also made a quick bond between them. No Fee called and kept Sên Ruben from Sên Toon oftener and longer than Ruben found it easy to forgive.

But the unkindest thing that No Fee did to Ruben was to make him put on one day for her amusement his English clothes; and it took all No's cajolery and all her persistence to do it. Sên Ruben had no intention of returning to England—and to his mother—wearing Chinese clothes. He liked making himself conspicuous, striking an attitude, as little as all nice Englishmen do. But he had even less intention of wearing Bond Street materials and cuts in Ho-nan. The Chinese garments that he had donned and carried awkwardly and with so much embarrassment in the hill-perched monastery had grown more comfortable, seemed more his own, than English tailorings, naturally and easily as he always had worn them, ever had. He knew that he always should miss his Chinese clothes: their ease, and, more than their ease, their color.

When she made it, Sên Ruben refused her request. No Fee

pouted and scolded; then she changed her tactics, discarded shrill peremptoriness and coaxed as only Sên No Fee could coax. "Only once, to give me pleasure, cousin-one who art dear to the heart of this little Chinese girl" was hard to resist, and so was her hand on his sleeve, and so was the wet in her eye. Sên Ruben wavered. Then the whole *kuei* backed her up, added its pleadings to hers. And when the oldest of his kinswomen, Sên Wed O—a lady of royal lineage, whose vision of the world had been bounded, he knew, by the walls of two courtyards, her father's and her husband's—begged with the graciousness of the old aristocrat who had no doubt that she and her white hairs would be obeyed, begged as a kindness to her untraveled self, Sên Ruben yielded.

He chose a day when he knew that his kinsmen had gone hawking, graybeards, youngsters and all. He made excuse not to go with them, and when their gay cavalcade had jingled away he made a wry face and changed into his English clothes.

How ugly they were! How queer his boots felt!

He hated himself in them almost as much as poor little Ivy had for years hated her face in the glass.

But he had promised; and he went, oddly uncomfortable, moving awkwardly, feeling gauche, looking shy.

But because he had promised his kinswomen he did it graciously. He went to them with a smile, and he gave them their way of him. It was their treat; it certainly was not Sên Ruben's. Ruben Sên was not here.

The *kuei* buzzed about him.

They pushed and they pulled; they gave him shrill cries and gurgled, tittering; they felt him; they turned him about. They looked him over and over with kindly, critical eyes. And the pet dogs sniffed at his barbarian clothes and barked at him questioningly.

Madame Sên, of Imperial blood, *doyenne* here and supreme,

bade them all leave him alone, bade them draw away to the edges of the courtyard where they belonged. The women obeyed her, the wee dogs did not.

She called him nearer to her that she might examine and look her fill. And she thanked him.

"You find me hideous, venerable, honorable mother-one," Ruben said when she, having spoken, gave him freedom of speech. "This miserable person finds himself most hideous in these abominable, detestable, foreign-land clothes. Just this once, O queen-one of all the Sêns! Thou wilt not command it of thy slave-one again?"

"No," Madame Sên nodded. Best Bond Street garments had not found favor in her old, narrow, black-velvet eyes. And the gracious gesture of her hand was a promise.

But No Fee giggled; and he heard it as a threat.

Madame Sên did not dismiss him, but she took up her embroidery frame again, and Ruben read it as a sign that he might stay by her stool or move about as he would.

He drew back a few paces, and the laughing courtyard rabble swooped on him again; at least all the women did; the dogs played apart or snoozed by the flower-wall.

They tottered about him on their richly shod golden-lilies. They looked at him roguishly, screamed they were shocked at his trousers, which some of them were. No demanded his coat then and there, that she might try it on. Probably Sên No Fee would have had her way too, had Madame Sên not glanced up from her needle with a word of protest which not even No the hoyden dare disobey here in the *kuei*. Sên Ruben had no doubt that, at some other time and place, No Fee would make her demand again.

Ruben began to enjoy himself in their rioting mirth. He declined to take off his boots, that they might see and probably examine his stockings; he declined to put on his coat the other way about; but he gave up his cuff links and his

tie-pin with pleasure; and presently he fell in tune with their frolic mirth, chased No Fee over the flagstones, joined willingly enough in a game of blindman's buff. And Madame Sên looked grave, kindly approval across her lacquer embroidery frame.

There always is a strain of melancholy, a something, too, of bitterness and rebellion in the Eurasian who is neither brutish nor a dolt. If the strain of melancholy in Ruben Sên had been all but subconscious in Europe, and sternly repressed so far as he had realized it, it had been for that but the sharper. Until he came to China he had not felt (or known that he did) mixed blood a disgrace, for he was incapable of laying any shred of disgrace at the door of his parents; but he always had grieved that the gods had denied him the full of his Chinese birthright: the skin of his people, the set of their bones, the black of their eyes, a home in Ho-nan.

For all that, his life had been happy: pleasantly placed, loved and companioned by the mother he adored and of whom he was proud. Too—there was great natural sunshine in Ruben Sên, the son of Ruby Gilbert, at whose birth a star had danced, and the son of a man whose race is tuned to contentment and gladness. He was young. And before long he was pranking with his young kinswomen as gaily as they.

Suddenly No saw his face darken, saw Ruben stand stock-still, nonplused and perturbed.

Sên Toon had come into the courtyard; stood watching them. Madame Sên had smiled at Sên Toon affectionately when he made his deep salutations to her, and she had smiled softly in her sleeve. She knew why Sên Toon had been downcast and sad-eyed for more than a moon. And she knew how his discomfort would pass, would die in sweetest music in a garden of roses.

Sên Ruben had believed that Sên Toon had gone a-hawking



with all the others. And it cost Ruben more than a pang, he felt it a shame, that Toon saw him foreign-land-clad in a Sên courtyard.

Toon made his way to Ruben.

"Come into the woods with me," Toon asked; "I want to talk to you." Toon said it in English.

"I will companion you before that white and rose cloudlet has crossed over the day star," Ruben replied. He said it in Chinese. "Wait but till I change into my own garments again. I will change quickly."

"Why change?" Sên Toon persisted in speaking English.

Sên Ruben as persistently spoke in Chinese. "I loathe that you have caught me in this masquerade that Sên No Fee extorted."

"The first sensible thing I can recall that our wild and unpardonably spoilt one has done. I envy you your Western clothes—they are manlier. And I envy you much that they stand for."

"Rubbish," Ruben snapped more rudely than Chinese gentlemen, and above all close kinsmen, often speak to each other. "I must change before I come with thee. It would shame me till shame curdled my stomach did our kinsmen returning from the chase see me dressed as I am."

"Sên King-lo dressed so?" Sên Toon asked.

"*In Europe*," Ruben admitted. "Almost one must there now. At least, it seems more convenient, since most of us do. Kow Li does not. I honor him that he does not. But I know no other Chinese living in London, except Kow Li's own servants, possibly too a few in 'Chinatown,' who do not."

"Come, let us go," Sên Toon urged. "They are hawking far from here; they will not return until the Hour of the Dog has died in the sky, and more likely the Hour of the Pig. None will see what you wear but me and the leaves on the trees."

Ruben yielded.

Not again in Ho-nan, not for No Fee, not for the august Sên herself would he wear foreign garments. But now he would not keep Sên Toon waiting. No one would see them, Toon had said; and Ruben, without suspecting the reason, still less suspecting the remedy, had seen for weeks that his favorite kinsman was sorely out of gear. Toon wanted to talk to him, and Toon should do it immediately, purge the troubled stuff of his bothered mind through the confessional of fraternal speech, if he could.

They made obeisance to Madame Sên, who waved them with a tiny withered hand permission to go and gracious parting; tore themselves from the clamoring girls; and Toon led the way out of the "flowery," across a flower-spangled meadow and into the thick of the walnut grove.

"What troubles you? Bid me what I can do," Sên Ruben began when he saw how hard Sên Toon found it to begin. Ruben was un-Chinese in his dislike of delay—and in several things else.

"There is nothing you can do for me," Toon spoke grimly, "unless you can change places with me. I'd commit suicide, if it were not for the grief to my mother. I'd cut and run were it not for the disgrace to the girl."

Ah! Ruben pricked up his ears, and his face that had been all sympathy was half clouded with fear.

"A maiden you have seen by accident and wish for your bride?" Sên Ruben could understand that. "Can't it be arranged? Your father and mother both are indulgent. Or is the maiden-one already betrothed? It isn't a peasant-one, is it, Sên Toon?" The still worse that he feared Ruben did not word.

"I never have seen her in my life, but she is betrothed all right. They are going to marry her to me when the Sky Lantern is at its full." Sên Toon began in English, then

burst into passionate Chinese. His face was twitching and his hands twisted his girdle angrily. "I am caught in the coil of a poison-dragon, Sên Ruben, the creature has slimed me, there is no escape."

"And there is some one else?" Ruben probed gently.

"Ha?" Toon asked dully; he had not caught Sên Ruben's meaning.

"Some other maiden you love and long to wed?" Sên Ruben explained.

Sên Toon laughed impatiently. "All the gods, no! Love—what chance has a Chinese to love? Betrothed in our cradles, it may be, thrust into wedlock with some strange girl—thing whom we are sure to hate, and who's sure to hate us!"

"It seems not to work out so," Ruben protested. "All the wives in our *kuei* are happy, Sên Toon."

"They don't know any better," Sên Toon grumbled contemptuously.

"They know a great deal, I have found," Ruben defended, "and they all are charming. And their husbands love them. Clearly that is so. I have not been in this jewel country of ours many moons, but I have watched even as a hungry child watches the face of his mother; and I have learned, and I *know*, that marriage success, marriage contentment in China is to success and contentment of Western marriage as Omi is to a hillock of clover."

"It works here sometimes," the other owned grudgingly, "but I have traveled, I have seen freedom. My soul cries for its freedom. I want to choose my bride."

Sên Ruben had no answer to that. He had chosen his bride, and no power on Earth or on-High should dissuade him. He did not speak for a long time. When he did he felt that his words were feeble.

"Since you love no other maiden," he said, "surely all will be well. Your father is wise. He will have selected a beau-

tiful maid who is as kind and accomplished as she is beautiful. Both your brothers dote on their wives."

"I swear to the gods that I will hate mine. Her face may be as beautiful as an egg, her voice the voice of a lute in the moonlight, but I will hate her. I spit at the thought of her, because she is thrust upon me. Let her be the most charming maiden that ever came in her red chair from courtyard to courtyard and the kindest, I swear to all the gods that I will loathe her!" Sên Toon's voice broke in his pain; he was trembling violently. Sên Ruben feared that Sên Toon would keep his terrible oath. Ruben's heart was sore for his cousin, very sore for the bride that would come when the moon rode at its full.

"Does your father know, Sên Toon? He loves you greatly."

"No one knows but you. I could hold it no longer," Sên Toon sobbed and hid a tempest of tears in his sleeve.

Ruben Sên was revolted and ashamed. Ho-nan had gripped him and always would hold him. But Eton and Cambridge held their grip of him too; Ho-nan could not shatter all that they had bred and ingrained. All his being was shamed to see a man cry! And his kinsman, a Sên! Sên Toon was weeping wildly. He wept like a man battered and defeated, a man at bay and exhausted. He wept like a whip-frightened child.

"Is it too late?" Sên Ruben suggested presently, "too late to ask your honorable father's indulgence, to tell him what you feel?"

"He would not understand," Sên Toon said surlily. His breast still heaved, but the tempest had passed. Ruben Sên thanked all the stars that it had. "The inevitable will be. I was pledged to it before I tasted the salt of Western freedom. I must go on with it. But, by underworld god himself, no son of mine, still less a daughter of my loins, ever shall go an unwilling victim to wedlock with a stranger. I

shall go on with it because I must. I can divorce her afterwards perhaps. But to escape her, I must marry her first. A Chinese betrothal cannot be broken—" Sên Ruben knew that that was true. "After betrothal there is no loophole for the bride, and only one for the bridegroom. A shopkeeper's son may take it sometimes; I have heard that it has been done in Canton, but no girdle-wearer can take it; for us it is not a loophole."

Sên Ruben assented. He knew that a dagger was worn conspicuously in one of the groom's high bridal boots, but that no gentleman, when he lifted the red veil from a trembling girl's face—and liked it not—could throw that dagger in violence, repudiation and dismissal at her feet. In theory, so could the bridegrooms of several provinces refuse the new-made wife, and Ruben had heard that sometimes ere they sent him to the nuptial chamber anxious parents had been known to ply a boy bridegroom with wine that he might see his bride's face, through a rosy hue, fairer than it was. He doubted if the cruel custom held in Ho-nan even among the peasant-ones. It was an offense no Sên could offer to a maid who had drunk with him the red-tied marriage cup, worshipped with him at the ancestral tablets.

The cousins walked on in silence. Ruben could think of nothing to say. Sên Toon had said all his words, purged his angry heart as far as he could.

Perhaps the leafy forest healed him: a cathedral sanctuary green and faintly fragrant. For the troubled boyish face slowly cleared. Perhaps the bright-winged birds cheered him as they flew friendly-low from tree to tree and sang to him joyously.

Sên Ruben cried out in dismay when they left the thick-leaved grove and he saw how high the day-star had risen.

Sên Toon read his cousin's thought. "I will get you to your pavilion unseen, Sên Ruben. Our kinsmen shall not



see you, since you shrink it. Just beyond that clump of loquats is a miracle. Also is it one of the loveliest sights in all Ho-nan. I would show it to you. He who has not seen the nourish-old-age of Kow Lôk the witch has not seen Ho-nan."

## CHAPTER XXXII

SÊN RUBEN gave a cry when they had passed the loquats. So smothered in wee white roses, in creeping columbines, and imperial wistaria that its thatched roof scarcely showed at all, a tiny reed hut lay in an acre of peach trees—peach trees in bloom! Low criss-crossed bamboos fenced house and orchard. Blue and amethyst hills backed it; a tiny silver stream danced laughing through the peach trees; ferns of many sorts nodded delicately at the gnarled trunks' wide roots. The little grayish house—for the well-kept reeds were old—was flanked by a wide well and a sheltered dung-heap. A memorial-truth-stone with pink and red pampas grass on either side stood at the threshold. The tiny hut looked comfortable and cared-for; the orchard looked a wealth of prosperous agriculture—was exquisite wealth of beauty. And it was prodigality of incense. Never yet did prayer-sticks belch such sweetness.

It lay alone, apart, the peach-sweet place. Ruben caught a sense of imperative isolation about it. No cat or dog, not even a painted god or dragon, guarded its gate; a leg-nimble urchin could have vaulted its low fence of low-cut bamboos; but Sên Ruben heard the whole place say, "Enter not. There is no welcome here." And for all it smelt so sweet, its voice that forbade was acrid and stern; for all that it looked a suntrap of prosperity and luster, Sên Ruben felt cold air swirl and hiss about him, a chill that snapped at his face like

bullets, as if forbidding him to come nearer, defying him to enter and trespass. At its West, beyond its low green fence, a line of tall cypress trees stood grim, grew deep and thick: the sentinel trees of the burial place of the Kows, Sên Ruben believed them. If they were those, a few *li* beyond them lay the scraggling one-street Village-of-the-Kows-Whose-Women-Spin-Well-and-Bear-Many-Sons.

Sên Ruben knew village and grave-place well, but never had approached either through the Walnut Grove or by the direction Sên Toon had brought him here to-day. In the old moss-grown village he had sought out and greeted for Kow Li each living Kow of Li's generation and remembrance; and at the graves of Li's ancestors he had made for Kow Li obeisance and worship long and profound. But he never had heard of Kow Lôk or of her paradise of peaches. Why? He had told them he was anxious to see all the Kows, that he might take word of them to Kow Li. And he had charged Kow Yong Shu to guide him to every Kow home near enough for their journeying. Why had they kept him from old Kow Lôk?

He caught his breath and his pulse quickened at the beauty of the blossomed, hill-cupped place.

Ruben spoke at last. "You called her witch? Do you believe her that?" Sên Ruben loved all the old tales that the peasants told, but all superstition, even Chinese superstition, was abhorrent to him.

Sên Toon chuckled. "Of course not. We Chinese pretend to believe a great deal that we do not believe at all. Confucius was the great agnostic, far more deeply agnostic than the Ingersoll I heard so much of when I was at Yale. Most of our sash-wearers are agnostics, at least the men-ones. Women will believe everything, everywhere, I think. But we who are men cling to the old superstitions for love of them,

love of their color and story, and for the use we make of them with the "babies." For example of it, *Li Ch'un*. You came to us at Greeting the Spring, you remember. The peasant ones could not be taught, or grasp, the scientific processes upon which we base its predictions. Tell them as we do that the Spring Ox is supernaturally painted, in Peking, and they believe it, heed his message and profit by it—as do their crops. It *is*, often as not, kneaded together of water and flour and covered with straw. Sometimes it *is* put in a well-barred room of the Astronomical Board, with paints and a brush near it, and when it is taken out again the next day indubitably Ox has been painted—and painted by spirit fingers or by a blind man, the babies believe. At the end of *Li Ch'un*, if a magistrate—one lays on it his hand or his wand of office in a temple courtyard, they fall upon it and batter it to bits and each of the silly-ones pads off with as much Ox as he can to mix with his manure that his millet and corn cannot fail to thrive. Explain to them the processes of reasonable weather forecasting, and you pour a cupful of water on to a sea-sucking desert. No Sên believes that Kow Lôk is a witch—no Sên man—or that there *are* witch-ones. But she is clairvoyant; she does and tells strange things. That is past denial. She is blind—but she sees; she is deaf—but she hears. You yourself shall know that she does, if she does not drive us from her presence. For I am going to take you in to her."

"Shall we get in?"

"There is nothing to keep us out; neither bolt, bar nor guard. Not a peasant in all the province would enter even the edge of her *yang-lao-ti* unless she gave them welcome. They believe her a witch-one of tremendous and infernal power. They believe that demons come at her bidding, always at night, do her errands, bring her food and prepare it,

tend her orchard, gather her peach crop when it is ripe, cart it and sell it—such as we do not come and entreat for, and pay her much price for.”

“Who does? Works in this wonderful orchard, brings her food and prepares it?”

“She does.”

“Impossible—one feeble, bed-ridden old woman!”

“Yes,” Sên Toon asserted, but his eyes were dancing. “Kow Lôk is paralyzed, has not risen from her mat for years—the babies will vow it. Not one of them will pass by her bamboo fencing after the Hour of the Hen. But this person who speaks to you has seen her do it. One must be stealthy to watch her unseen and unsuspected. Sên Toon has accomplished it. No doubt she sleeps much by the daytime. But she rouses at the lightest footfall, and she plies a brisk trade from her sleep mat. She will sell you a love philter; I am not sure that she will not sell you a poison, if you will pay enough for it. I have wished to see Kow Lôk and have feared her welcome. When Kow Lôk chooses to be dumb, no force, cajolery, or gold will make her speak. And always she curses the Sêns. You in your English clothes she will not know for a Sên or think Chinese. She will grab any gold you will give her and will speak to you, I think; she may let fall to you a word of value to me—burl one at me even, if she is in her holiday mood, as she is sometimes and is apt to soften at the touch of gold.”

“Why does she hate the Sêns? I thought all the Kows were our bondsmen in love even as in our old feudal holding of them.”

“Sên Ya Tin took her lover from her; bought her, as Lôk believed, in betrothal to one Kow and married her to another. Our sainted old-one did it in her wisdom, but for it Lôk has cursed all of our blood ever since the bridegroom substitution was forced upon her. I will tell you the story as we

take our homeward way. Come, we will go to her now. Have a care that you speak before her only in French or English. I will interpret; so shall we baffle her of her hatred of you as a Sên-one, and, too, you will hear twice all she utters, and so doing hold it in your memory the longer and surer. Remember, Sên Ruben, you are going to have audience of one of China's greatest clairvoyants. I hold nothing of witchcraft—it is silliness—but there are Chinese sibyls who can unveil both past and future. All the gods grant that Kow Lôk will see and tell for us to-day!”

The woman looked a hundred, huddled on her mat. But she turned her head sharply as they stepped over the hut's raised door-sill—raised to keep floor draughts out, as in better Chinese houses than this one sills usually are. Chinese floors are chill places, usually carpetless.

Her eyes looked sightless, overgrown with the darkness of age or disease. Her nostrils quivered angrily. Did she see, Ruben wondered, by the sense of smell?

Her face snarled, and she sprang to her height and stood facing them both defiantly, enraged and forbidding.

“So?” she exclaimed before Sên Ruben could speak, before Sên Toon would, “the white Sên has come home, home to the Queendom of Sên Ya Tin!” She spat out their old-one's name as it were venom.

Was it clairvoyance? Had gossip reached her? Or did she *see* and guess? Ruben thought the last; Toon believed the first. But they both felt an icy gust enwrap and sting them, though the hot afternoon sun poured in through the hut's one fan-shaped window.

“White son of the grandson of ruthless Sên Ya Tin, what have you here? What seek you of Kow Lôk?”

“Mother, I bring you gold.”

Before Sên Toon could translate, she had held out her hand. “This person will count it.”



Ruben was well provided. He laid generous largess in Lôk's skinny palm, and saw as he did that her hand and her arm were sinewy as a plowman's. And he had seen the vigor with which she had sprung to her feet, and had marveled. She was attenuated, clear-eyed, her scant, draggled hair was white as new snow; but this was no weakling, paralysis never had touched her. Ruben saw her strong as sound whipcord, stronger than many men at their prime.

The woman did not finger the gold; she held it contemptuously in her coupled hands, shaking them slowly once and again. Then, "You pay well," she said, and named to a *guan* what Ruben knew he had given her.

Sên Ruben, not knowing what next to say, fearing to infuriate, at a loss how to placate, waited her further speech, and as he waited looked eagerly about this tiny room in which a Kow woman lived alone.

The floor was of hard beaten earth. The fireless *k'ang*, a brazier, a scant array of cooking utensils, a cup, a plate, a wooden dipper by the water bucket, a gong (the babies believed, so Toon told him afterwards, that with it the witch summoned the demons that served her) a cheap kitchen-god, and upon a shelf a valueless vase were all that furnished the meager room.

In the vase were a few cotton flowers, faded and old, and a feather a wild gander had dropped. Ruben's eyes widened and questioned, and he looked hard and long. He would have questioned her, but he did not dare. The room grew colder and colder; Sên Toon was shivering; and the low afternoon sun beat in hotter and hotter through the open window.

Ruben Sên had seen the mate of that cheap tawdry vase before, just such coarse, crude, cloth flowers and the feather of a mandarin goose in it—in London.

"Wah! Wah!" the woman shrieked, "it smells of blood,

Sên blood, and it smells of the blood of a girl's heart that Sên Ya Tin crushed under her shoe. I'll not of it! It soils me! Crawl to it," she cried, "pick it up, pouch it," she hissed as she hurled the gold down, "or leave it there and it shall feed my cess-pool when my servants come, the imps of hell who come in the dark to serve me."

They left the gold where it had fallen. Sên Toon smothered a smile, though he was trembling still. Toon had no doubt that the crone would gather it up carefully and hide it safely when they had gone. Sên Ruben believed that the gold he had given would sink low in the cess-pool of Kow Lôk.

Neither hoped to win aught from Lôk to-day. They motioned each other that they would go.

Something strange and ill was happening here. Both had heard (Ruben a little, Toon much) of such uncanny demonstrations, but neither had believed. A dog growled, a cat meowed wildly; neither cat nor dog was here. The room grew dark, but they both could see. Tiny points of light darted hither and thither, darted and snapped. Vermin crawled towards them; the scattered coins looked slimy snakes.

They turned to go.

Kow Lôk laughed, and her laugh was ugly.

"Stay!" she commanded.

They knew that her word chained them.

"You have paid, and you shall have. Not even for my cess-pool will I from a Sên have aught for which I do not give value, and in full measure. One has paid, both shall hear. Thine," she spoke to Sên Toon, "is the liver of a fool. You spurn joy. It will spurn you in its youth and thine. It will flee from thee down to the Yellow Springs. When it leaves thee thy coward heart will break and never be whole again. Thou canst not escape thy fate, a golden fate while

the day-star circles China from now to Pepper Month and to Pepper Month thrice, then will it be accursed. I curse thee, Sên Toon son of Sên Wing-lu."

She turned to Sên Ruben with a cackling laugh, a withered grin. "Thou hast dared to crave a Chinese maiden, thou who art half-caste and skinless. Thou hast sought and not found. Thou shalt be found. But thou shalt lose. Go from me now, Sên and half-Sên. Come not again. Because of the cup you must drink, a cup I have drained, because of a love that has wrapped you, because of the love you return, love not given by woman, love not given to woman, you, white Sên, I will not curse. You go to woe. Go in peace. But come not again."

The darkness passed. The gold on the floor was yellow again. Kow Lôk huddled down on her mat and crouched there with a crackled gurgle that might have been pain or mirth or both, or only taunting rage. Sên Toon went at once, but Ruben lingered a moment looking once more intently at the small poor vase.

He would come here again, he resolved, as he followed Toon down the burnished crooked path and out of the unguarded gate.

The Sêns did not speak or look back until they reached the loquat trees. There Ruben paused, and they both turned and gazed musingly at the nourish-old-age of strange Kow Lôk.

In his secret heart Sên Toon felt that they had seen a miracle. Even now he did not believe that the woman was a witch, but she had convinced him that she had barter with the spirits of the underworld. He never had doubted—few Chinese do—that there were spirits that would come back to earth and that wrought there. If most educated Chinese are agnostic, the majority of all Chinese are spiritualistic.

Sên Ruben believed that they had seen trickery, sleight of hand and human frenzy. But the woman appealed to him; he would see her again, and go to her alone.

They did not speak of her again until they had made their way half through the forest of walnut trees.

"You promised me her story."

"Kow Lôk was born in Shen-si; her father was a boatman, one of the poorest. He broke some law, got deep in some questionable embroilment; I never knew just what. The man was tight-lipped, and his wife and children were too ignorant to tell, or dared not. Probably the wife herself did not know the truth; certainly the children were too young to know. They fled to Ho-nan, found their way and made it somehow. For years they were beggars by our waysides, but they were frugal. Little by little they got work: errands to run, odd fragments of toil to do. They attached themselves to no one, none to them; but at last they established themselves near a *tsa hsing* village; little by little by the slow growth of industrial companionships they grew in friendly touch with the villagers though never of them. The girl-child, growing to womanhood, grew inordinately beautiful. 'Peach-blossom' they called her. Our old men have told me that her loveliness might have gained her purchase into many a mandarin's harem. But the old waterman her father lacked the wit to negotiate with a *mei jên* to move in it. He was old and broken—homesick perhaps—and his wife died. She—the girl—was working at the edge of a paddy bed one day when Kow Li saw her—"

Sên Ruben did not start, was scarcely surprised; almost he had sensed it. And the vase had whispered it. Yes; he would see Kow Lôk again.

"—he was a comely stripling, I have heard, already marked in Sên Ya Tin's mind, for the service of her favorite grandson, your honorable father, destined King-lo's body servant,

if he proved worthy. In truth Kow Li the peasant boy had been Lord Sên King-lo's servant since first they two had toddled about under our queen-one's wise watchful eye. Li greeted her, Lôi answered. It grew. Often they met; at day by open accident, at night by stealth and unobserved. It flared—the love between them. Kow Li's father had consented. The girl's father made no objection. Nothing stood between the marriage but the necessary formalities of betrothal and the consent of our old queen-one. No one knew how often they met, and no one cared. The peasant girls, who must toil while they still smell of their mothers' milk until they are coffined, cannot have the seclusion of the courtyard maidens. Scarcely a peasant man who saw Lôi but would have taken her to wife, to be his number-two, if already he had a number-one; scarcely a sash-wearer but would have been willing to buy her for his slave girl. But Lôi scowled at them all, and her father was too lazy and decrepit to force her. She had but one love in her being, and she had given it to Kow Li. Kow Li gave her love and longing, but he loved also one other, Sên King-lo his master; loved his young lord intensely. Many moons went. The girl had no dowry; Kow Li was well-waged, but, as is our custom, Li's father pouched Li's pay-cash and was ill-stomached to return it for the big bridal expenses without which all the Kow kindred would have lost face forever. At last Kow Li, aching with waiting, being in attendance on our old queen-one, threw himself at her footstool and with his face on her carpet, prayed that he might speak; poured out his story; begged for advice.

"Sên Ya Tin was furious—but she strangled the outgoing of her rage. She had intended that Li should not take in marriage for years yet: she wished from him undivided service—a doting bridegroom could not give it. But she was just and she had wisdom, two qualities so rarely woman's



that perhaps it was that that welded her power, made her sovereign here. In her wisdom she knew that unwilling service is poor service. Sên Ya Tin wished none such for Sên King-lo. And her heart—oddly kind at times—told her that Kow Li had earned no punishment for listening to the clamor his hot heart made between his ribs. She told him what she wished and had planned for him. Next moon Lord Sên King-lo journeyed far, would be long away, in the Whites' strange and distant country. Would he, Kow Li, go with him his servant, never to leave or fail him? Or would he stay behind in their homeland—and wed with Peach Blossom? Freely she gave him his choice, commanded him to take it freely. If he chose to go with his lord-one, his exile would be long and painful, and his service must be life-long, and for many years wifeless. If he stayed she herself would dower the girl-one suitably and their marriage should lack nothing, neither bride-cakes nor fire-crackers. Kow Li chose instantly. As he came from our queen-one's presence he was weeping. Ere the next moon was ripe he went to England with his lord—your father; went without seeing Peach Blossom. He made the lesser sacrifice, I doubt not; he never faltered in it. But he lacked the courage to see Lôk before he went."

"Did he never see her again?"

"I am not sure, Sên Ruben. When your father and your honorable mother, whom Sên Ya Tin loved, journeyed to Ho-nan, Kow Li came not with them. He was left in your baby service in England. Before his marriage once Sên King-lo came here, and his servant Kow Li with him. If Kow Li saw Kow Lôk then (*she was* Kow Lôk then) no person saw or learned it. Whatever it was to Peach Blossom, to Kow Li it was final. Never in his letters to his kinsmen has he asked of her, Kow Sin has told me."

"And the girl, when he had gone?"

"They rushed her marriage through. By trickery or by force, I know not which, they wedded her to another Kow—a widowman who needed a care-one for his children. Ya Tin believed that sudden wifehood, the glitter of bridal, the dignity of being a headman's number-one would out-wipe the girl's young infatuation soonest. And so, the women in our courtyards tell me, it proves times eleven out of times twelve. This time it did not. Kow Lôk loathed her husband and shrieked it daytime and night-time. She bore him no child. Not all women give birth. Or perhaps in that, as in most else, her will proved stronger than his. To his children she never was unkind, and at his death, many years ago—her married life was brief—they would have kept her with them and tended her honorably; but Kow Lôk scorned it. It was her suggestion that they divide their father's land and goods immediately, as with her consent they could, instead of keeping all intact and sharing dwelling-house, labor and earnings, good luck and ill, until she, their legal mother, died. It suited them right well to divide their patrimony at once, for they had clashing inclinations; already two were wedded and between their wives there was no sweetness. Sooner than it often takes to accomplish such arrangements in China, it all was settled and Kow Lôk was in possession of her *yang-lao-ti*; she chose it herself. She would have no other."

Sên Ruben flushed with shame. He had worked so hard to learn, had so loved it, and Kow Li had so labored to teach him. But the ways of China garnered but scantily would fill endless tomes. He did not know what *yang-lao-ti* was. And he was ashamed to own that he did not.

Perhaps Sên Toon saw the question that had flickered in his cousin's eye. "Nourish-old-age seems to me an admirable custom. It makes parents too old to work, too old to guide the industry of their children and grandchildren, secure from want and bankruptcy. It enables adult men to work and to

think, decide for themselves before their vigor and interest have lost their prime and edge; they are no longer pensioners upon their parents' bounty, and past-work parents are no longer pensioners upon their child-ones' industry. It gives age ease and security, and it gives child-ones in their prime incentive and independence, as much independence as a Chinese *can* have while either of his parents lives. It is not for the girdle-wearers or for the rich, of course, but it is the occasional practice of those who must plant and reap their rice before they eat it; and they often find it a boon—both the younger and the aged—and to the younger it always is an incentive."

"She chose a lovely *yang-lao-ti*, a fruitful and prosperous 'nourish-old-age,'" Sên Ruben said.

"On the contrary. When Kow Lôk said that she would have that portion of the Kow-land or none, it was a barren nothing. There was neither tree nor hut on it. In their love-trysts Kow Li and she had been in the habit of meeting there, and, to give some color of industry to their companionship in so secluded a spot, they had been in the habit of sticking peach-stones in the ground, little thinking that planted so roughly the stones ever would shoot, nor caring if they did or not. Kow Lôk chose her nourish-old-age for remembrance, I think; No Fee—the only Sên the old crone does not hate and revile—asserts it. With her own hands, almost unaided, the widow-one built her tiny hut and thatched it. She was tremendously strong in those days. She planted her bamboo fence. Scarcely had she made her home there, where we saw her to-day, before tiny peach-slips pricked through the ground—through some miracle of gardening and luck, we have believed—through the intervention of the spirits that serve her, the babies believe. Who shall say? Not I, after what we two have seen to-day, Sên Ruben. However, it has come; her orchard has thriven beyond the memory of

known husbandry. And in all China no other peach fruit is so sweet and spiced as hers. Yet hers the birds of the air never peck."

Again they took their way in silence.

Sên Toon was thinking bitterly of a bride that was coming to him from Hu Peh—starting even now.

Sên Ruben was thinking deeply of Kow Li and of Kow Li's lifelong fealty, passing the fealty of woman, of Kow Li's fealty to Sên King-lo.

### CHAPTER XXXIII

SÊN TOON stood at the house door, waiting to lift his bride from her flowery-chair and carry her across the flaming threshold. Her cavalcade drew near. They were carrying her through the great outer gate-of-ceremony. Already the bride-test fire was lit at the house door, a low harmless "fire" of perfumed tinsels.

Sên Toon was splendid in a bridegroom's gorgeous trappings.

The boy's face was ashen—and looked the more ghastly for the gay raiment he wore.

Close behind him stood gathered the Sêns—even the women—ready to acclaim the bride, to whom no one yet must speak, and to greet her kinsmen who had accompanied her so far to give her to stranger hands—yield her forever to a strange undiscovered home, seal her in a new life that might prove garden, prison or tomb, to tell her good-by, and see her no more.

Sên Toon was not embarrassed; social embarrassment is not a Chinese trait; and his misery and distaste were far past mere embarrassment.

His kindred gathered about him there at the Ting Tzũ

Lang paid him little heed; they were too engrossed in watching for the girl hidden in the slow approaching bride-chair. In China—and where is she not?—the bride on her wedding day is of far more importance than the bridegroom. It is *her* day; and she predominates it, if all the rest of her life she has nothing to do but be meekly unimportant and obey. Besides, the Sêns had seen Sên Toon most of the days of his life; they had no curiosity about Sên Toon; they had a great deal concerning his bride; especially the Sên women had. He might neglect her, avoid her most of the time, if he chose. But all the *kuei* would be open to her, be hers. She might spend most of her time with them in their general courtyard. Would she add to its pleasantness or detract? An ill-natured concubine could contrive much discomfort for an entire household, a sour-souled wife could almost disrupt it and make their common courtyard purgatory come to earth instead of a sun-drenched garden of mirth, siesta and song. Truly this coming girl was almost of more importance to them than to Sên Toon, and they knew it. She would have no mother-in-law to fear, for Sên Toon's mother never had rebuked or crossed any one in her life and never would; she often went into the meadow damp rather than disturb a snail on the path or a lizard sleeping in the sun; and an *amah* could have ruled her—certainly her daughter-in-law would, if his wife pleased Sên Toon. True Sên Wed O was regnant in the *kuei*; but Sên Wed O was fat and indolent with years and sweetmeats; was always more apt to raise her eyebrows with an inscrutable glance than to raise her stick; and it was useless to predict which side Madame Sên would champion and triumph in any quarrel or disagreement. She was not fond of complaints; she had no stomach for advice. Always her judgments were her own. And this new-come-one had imperial blood and was greatly endowed, and her kindred were powerful. Small wonder that



the Sên ladies craned their necks as far over the shoulders of their men as they could when the bride-bearers set the bride-chair down.

Sên Ruben did not dwell in this or in any other *kuei*. He had little interest in the girl who had come to be made a Sên, no interest that was not vicarious and indirect. His eyes and his thought were for Sên Toon. Would Sên Toon go through with it? *Could* he? It was jolly hard lines on his cousin Toon, Ruben Sên thought. His sympathy was with Sên Toon.

Ruben Sên had come to China to learn and to admire. And Sên Ruben had done both. But once or twice the English blood in his blue Chinese veins had revolted at some custom intensely Chinese. Perhaps Ivy Ruby Gilbert's son was a little less Chinese than he believed himself, a little less Chinese than he earnestly wished to be. But had he never seen the face of a Chinese girl on a canvas at Burlington House, probably he would have condemned Sên Toon's reluctance and rancor to-day; for his soul was Chinese and he had seen in this home of his kinsmen the preponderant happiness of Chinese marriage. But he had seen a girl in a picture, and—what if he were in Sên Toon's place to-day? His gorge rose at the thought, and an Englishman's ire rose—and vowed.

The initial moment of Sên Toon's ordeal had struck. The bride's chair rested on the ground at the housedoor, the bearers turned and left it, with their sturdy backs toward it and went through the great gate, rubbing their arms as they walked. What would Sên Toon do?

He behaved like a man and a Sên. Instantly he went to the chair and thrust the clustering bridesmaids aside. He was a grave, dignified figure, in spite of his fantastic bridal brocades and foppery, his bead-dangled, bejeweled, charming love-pouch belching perfume and jangling coins as he

moved, wearing right lordly the proud, peacocked mandarin's hat which even a peasant may ape at his bridal.

Except a Burmese pagoda, newly built, untarnished and richly endowed, there is little in Asia more glittering, more intricately and lavishly ornamented than a Chinese Bride-chair of the first class. This chair was sumptuous—if Sên Toon had sent it reluctantly, he had sent it of great price. The bamboo carrying poles were lacquered with gold. The carrying poles were the least of it. The box (for a bride's chair is just that, a more or less richly bedizened box) was lacquered with gold-leaf and silver; it was carved and interlaced. Its two roofs rose to an apex of a great ball of topaz; the precious ball wore a jeweled crown. The up-sloping roofs were encrusted with marvelously wrought dragons and with kingfisher feathers. Unlike other Chinese roofs these did not tilt up at their edges. At each corner of both roofs an exquisite "lion" carved and molded of pure gold stood upright and watchful, with out-thrust tongues of coral. The eyes were jewels; the claws were ivory and silver. From the edge of the lower roof hung a deep fringe of alternate garnets, moonstones, turquoise, beryls, jasper and topaz. The box was a riot of arabesques and of crimson silk-lined open-work. At the back a shutter was opened slightly at the lower end, or the girl must have suffocated. In front a taut curtain of embroidered cloth of silver was closely fastened. There was a great deal of red about the chair. It was indescribable. The perfumes it smelt of must have cost a fortune. In her progress to the marriage-rite the Sêns had done their new woman and chattel royally well.

The bridesmaids, a dozen or more tiny maidens, too young to be profaned or lose face from the eyes of men or from gazing at men, as soon as their low litters had been lowered to the ground scrambled out before their *amahs* could help them, and scampered off on their wee crippled feet to pre-

vent the bridegroom from taking his bride. The maid of honor must have been ten years of age, the youngest looked two. They were dressed all alike in long, silver-edged blue satin tunics and crêpe orange trousers. Their wide sashes were bridal crimson. They wore no veils over their delicately painted baby faces, but they wore high, heavy-looking "maid crowns" of gold, pink and amber artificial roses. Their specks of feet, shod in jeweled brocades, sparkled and glittered. One hopes, more firmly than one believes, that soon the binding of feet may be reformed out of China; but how old eyes will miss them: the little golden lilies that for centuries have scampered over the gardens of China, over the hearts of Chinese men!

The bride's father descended from his betasseled palfrey's high saddle, her brothers from theirs, they with comparative agility, he with difficulty and assisted by his servants. Her kinsmen would follow her into the great *ch'ih*, watch all the ceremonies, bid her good-by in a few days; but neither in *ch'ih*, *hsi hua t'ing* nor temple, before the ancestral tablets of the Sêns nor at the marriage feast would one of them glance at the Sên ladies. But many a peep would the Sên women take at them, and the Sên men, seeing their women's misbehavior, would smile. It did not happen often; there was seldom opportunity.

Fire-crackers still crackled and snapped. Brass instruments still bellowed and screeched; the sweet song of the bamboo flutes was drowned in uglier sounds; but the music of the silver flutes pierced through it all.

Behind chairs, litters and palfreys hundreds of bearers waited to lay down such of the bride's gifts and furnishings as had not been sent several days before her. These bearers, all lifelong servants of her father's clan, the clan of Sia, were clad like lords, though in fabrics flimsier and cheaper than real lord-ones wear; but they looked the peasants they

were. Nowhere on earth can race be disguised or aped, and least of all in China. A list of what they carried would fill a thick catalogue. Two of the bride-belongings were of super-importance, though compared with much they were of minor cost. The wild geese in their great strong, wire-covered cage Sên Toon had sent to her in betrothal and in presage and promise of lifelong married felicity. The wild geese of China never remate, and once mated never quarrel or forsake. On a great crimson tray four satin-clad coolies carried, in candlesticks of gold and tortoise shell, a pair of gigantic betasseled red-candles, virgin and unlit. They would stand by her bed or in the family temple as she chose, but not even the head of the house of Sên might order them lit until the birth hour of Sên Sia Fûtsin's first son; and then not even the head of the house of Sên could forbid her midwife to light them. They, too, Sên Toon had given in betrothal, talismans of motherhood.

Behind the red-clad candle-bearers came two others, carrying another immense red tray on which potted in carved silver stood a dwarf orange tree rich with its own golden fruit and fantastically festooned with gold coins, an emblem of continued wealth. Red-clad musicians followed the "flowery" chair and were interspersed and noisy in all the long procession's length. Behind the bride, before her, and again and again were bride-banner bearers. The bride-banners were indescribable; some were shaped like great wide-winged beetles riding above embroidered and flower-edged squares of silk; some were shaped even more fantastically, resembling great-eyed crustaceans with ridged outspread wings that were jauntily tipped by embossed plaques of gold-crustaceans that rode on stiffer, more irregularly shaped under-devices of silk. The men who held them were imperially and theatrically garbed. The banners' tall twisted poles were of lacquer, gold or red. On the two most important, the nuptial ban-

ners, were beautifully inscribed the names of the fathers of the nuptial pair who still were those fathers' chattels.

As Sên Toon went towards his bride Sên Ruben saw the flash of the splendid jewels in the hilt of the dagger that Toon wore sheathed in his high red-leather boot.

The bridesmaids dashed on the bridegroom, beat at him with tiny fat rose-leaf yellow baby hands. They were so young that, in defense of their mistress, his bride, they might touch him, beat against his well-clad shoulder, if they could reach it. One of them almost did; two clawed at his sleeve; two pulled at his knees; the others beat and tore at his boots; one dimpled, painted mite tripped up over his foot, found it a good resting place, and lay there face up gurgling and laughing at him affectionately as she scolded and cursed him, calling him a thief, a beast and a coolie.

Sên Toon beat them off tenderly, tossing a handful of sweetmeats a few feet away, to divert and entice them. But they had been well chosen and well drilled; they clung to him but the closer—beat at him and tore at his garments the harder, thrashing him hard with their rosebud hands. Again and again he drove them away; again and again they came back, clung closer, assaulted him harder and buzzed about him like angry, playful, jubilant bees.

Sên Toon routed the pretty infant Amazons at last, or perhaps the chief *amah* had whispered them to desist. They stood a little apart, breathless but giggling softly, and the tiniest tot of them all sat where she had fallen, sucking her thumb and devouring Lord Sên Toon with wistful, worshiping eyes. The youngest bridesmaid had fallen deeply in love with the bridegroom.

Sên Toon ripped the tinsel crimson curtain away, ripped it aslit and off, bent over the red-veiled motionless figure in the bride-come-box, lifted her up, sprang with her in his arms over the perfumed fire that smoked and flamed on the door-



step, stamped at it contemptuously with a red bridal boot, and carried the bride in his arms through the *ting tzü lang* and lesser *langs*, through the *t'ings ch'ih*, roofed and decorated for the bridal ceremony.

Sên Ruben pressed close beside him, and Sên Ruben's heart was heavy. Little could he see of the crimson bundle in his cousin's arms, but he thought that the girl swathed and bundled in bridal crimson was dumpy and heavy. One of her bejeweled hands slipped out from the folds of her veil; not at all a pretty hand. And next to her binded feet a lovely hand is the most indispensable attribute of a Chinese lady's beauty. The matchmaker had swindled Sên Toon, and the heart of Sên Ruben was wroth.

Through the covered passageways and reception halls, her kinsmen and his kindred close behind them, Sên Toon carried her, but he and his bride went hand in hand into the *ch'ih*—the great marble-paved, roofless courtyard, over-roofed and richly carpeted to-day, and greatly decked and garnished for the nuptial rite of Sên Toon and the girl who walked beside him, still blinded by her veil—walked guided by his hand. He led her to the *daïs*, helped her up its few steps, and seated her beside him on their throne.

On the marriage *daïs* the astrologer, who had chosen the propitious bridal day, tied them together with red silk cords, ankle to ankle, waist to waist more loosely. Together they drained a pair of jasper wine cups also knotted together by cords of red. It was then that Sên Ruben saw for an instant the bride's face; she moved her veil a little to find the rim of the cup her bridegroom held to her lips, and as she did so the jeweled fringe of her crown, another dense veil in itself, slipped aside, just for an instant, and Ruben saw! No one else did; Sên Toon's eyes were on the cup, careful not to spill the nuptial wine; no one else stood where he could see. Not deformed, and the face of a lady-one, yet Ruben Sên saw it

disconcertingly plain. Not a face to win a husband's love, he thought. And he read her chin too firm, her lips too thin and threateningly willful—an ugly, selfish face. It repelled Sên Ruben, and his heart was sore for Sên Toon. Almost, had it not been impossible so to affront a girl, Ruben could have snatched the nuptial wine cups from Sên Toon's hand and dashed them down. He had thought, as he followed them through the *t'ings* and *langs*, that the girl's gait was ungainly; but looking down at her red-shod feet, as she sat on the *daïs*, he started at their loveliness; he had not seen tinier feet in China. There were not golden lilies to match them in all the courtyards of the Sêns. Sên Toon had that to his happiness!

When they left the *daïs* at long last, bride and groom bowed to each other again and again and bowed low and often to their kindred—three of hers, dozens of his—and their relatives bowed as often, not so low, to them. Sên Toon led her to the ancestral tablets, and there they bent repeatedly and worshiped. That done she was a Sên, no longer a Sia; but she was not yet his wife. Out of the *ch'ih*, through the inner garden and courtyard into her own room in the *kuei*, Sên Toon led the girl, closed the panel closely, lifted the red veil from her face, quietly laid his dagger on the veil where it had fallen, a gauzy cloud of silken crimson, and they were man and wife—though their eyes had not met; neither had looked at the other yet. The priests were praying in the great ancestral temple, a gorgeously appareled motley crew of priests, both Buddhist and Taoist. For the Sêns for centuries had kept every road to Heaven open and well tended. If they took all the religions of China somewhat lightly, they trod them all with decorum, if mostly they walked them on hireling priestly feet.

For an hour the now wedded ones were left alone, then her bridesmaids burst in upon them. And Sên Toon left

the nuptial chamber. Until the dark came, until the day broke red in the sky, her clamorous maids sported about the new wife-one, joked about her, taunted her, did their utmost to make her speak. She took no notice of them, spoke not, scarcely moved. And rushing from the chamber when the gongs of the house struck the Hour-of-the-Dragon, the troop of laughing girls ran through the house, screaming out exultantly that she had neither laughed nor cried, asked for food nor spoken. She would prove a model wife; for she was not talkative, and she was not gluttonous and ne'er would she ask for tea or rice. Not even mushrooms or melons would tempt her until she had served her lord or heard that he had eaten in the outer quarters.

All night long Sên Toon paced up and down alone in the orchard. No one sought him. Sên Ruben wished to but dared not. Ruben pitied the heavy droop of Sên Toon's shoulders, the miserable drag of Sên Toon's feet. The heart of the white Sên rebelled against the proscribed and arbitrary customs of Chinese marriage. Ruben Sên had found one sore thing in China, and Sên Ruben felt it such.

Only those two cousins kept watch and wakefulness until the giggling bridesmaids came trooping through the house with the daylight. One by one the others sought their couches or sleep-mats. Sên Ruben saw Madame Sên yawn long before her departure from the feast-hall licensed the others to follow her; for when a great Chinese lady whose hairs are white, and she rich in years, mingles at such sacred functions with the men-ones she ranks above them all. But when Ruben saw her watching Sên Toon's unhappy pacing, as she turned away to the *kuei*, Sên Ruben heard her chuckle.

When the sun was halfway up the bamboos, Sên Toon turned slowly towards the house and went to his wife. And for several days Sên Ruben did not catch sight or hear word of Sên Toon.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

SÊN RUBEN heard some one running after him up the Peach-tree Hill, turned and saw that it was Sên Toon, but scarcely recognized him. Toon took the tiny trickling brook with a merry leap, and Toon's face was glowing; Sên Toon's eyes were triumphant.

"Strike me, Sên Ruben, strike me for a dolt and monster!" Toon cried half in shame, but all in gladness, panting a little from the pace he'd come. "Forget my silly railings. Never remember them, I entreat thee, O Sên Ruben. She is carved out of opal; she is made of roses; all the odors of the peaches of the garden of immortality perfume her. Oh, I have done penance at her feet. Her *feet*, Sên Ruben! They are loveliest in China. All of her is loveliest in all the world. And she is kind and sweet as she is beautiful. I am drunk with happiness. My wife is the twin of my soul, the gold glory of my existence. If I go on-High to-morrow I have lived an eternity in Paradise since last we spoke together, thou and I. But pray all the gods, pray them hard, I entreat thee, that I live to nurse my son-ones and their son-ones in my arms; the love-buds of my celestial marriage."

Sên Ruben promised to do it, deeply glad that marriage had blinded Sên Toon. Only blindness could account for this. He remembered the bride-one's face quite clearly. Then suddenly he remembered the old Sên woman's contented chuckle as she had looked down on Sên Toon from the lantern-hung casement. Did Madame Sên know of some necromancy of which he never had heard? This was witchcraft or sheer madness. Better so, if it could last! But it could not. It must pass, and then life would sour again for poor Sên Toon, more bittered than before. Probably Sên Toon would travel then, far and long, if Sên Wing-lu, his father, and Sên

Wed O the regnant Madame Sên would let him. Poor girl! Ruben was sorry for her, widowed by her husband's absence and repudiation. Of course Toon could divorce her—there were ways—but Ruben had not heard that ever a Sên had done it. Certainly it was not a Sên way.

Sên Toon babbled on. There was no need for Ruben to speak; Sên Ruben was glad that there was not. Nor did Sên Toon stay long.

"You must see her. She will greet you kindly for my sake, and you will envy me her beauty. You shall see her soon—at our picnic among the graves—it draws near, and this year our women are coming with us to make merry among the tombs when we have finished our pious worshipping. You shall see my treasure, Sên Ruben, and our happiness. Until then"—and Sên Toon was running down the Peach-tree Hill, over the brook, across the scented meadows like a drunken lapwing. Sên Ruben shrugged, wondering, and, with odd perplexity darkening his fair face, watched Toon out of sight.

At the picnic among the graves some days later young Mrs. Sên Toon made her real family *début* among the Sêns. Only her own maids and her infatuated husband had really seen her until now. The wives of the family had visited her formally as she sat all but speechless on her painted ivory bed, in her own room with peacocks' feathers strewn thickly on its lacquered floor; and she had served them herself with tiny cups of boiling tea and thickly sugared sweetmeats; but the girls and children had not seen her at all, and no Sên man except Sên Toon had. But she came to the picnic, carried there in a litter almost as gay as her bride's chair. And when the prostrations at the graves were done, and done, too, the ceremony of introducing her to all these graves of Sên, she made merry with them all, as merry as No Fee herself, and No Fee was in wild frolic mood to-day.



The men were presented to her, and she to them, one by one, as was now their right, for she now was of their blood, a Sên woman, living in the Sên ladies' *kuei*. Sên Toon was vastly proud and showed it, pulling at an imaginary beard with all the pomp of a thrice-wived graybeard. The bride's girlish face was flushed with shy happiness as well as crusted with paint. Certainly she was pigeon-plump, but not so plump as Sên Ruben had thought; she had a dimple or two. Ruben suspected that she had charm, and he saw the softness of her eyes that followed Sên Toon whenever he moved away from her a pace—her eyes did not follow Sên Toon often. Sên Ruben wondered how he had thought her so plain. She lacked Ivy's loveliness; she lacked No Fee's; a hundredfold she lacked the loveliness of the pictured face that had fired his soul and twisted his blood; but the girl was not exactly plain. When the picnic boxes were unpacked and the flasks unstoppered she served her young lord meekly; but Ruben saw her eyes sparkle down into Sên Toon's and saw Toon put a titbit or two between her lips. He saw Toon's fingers linger at their task, saw them tremble, too, as his bride knelt beside her lord pouring amber wine into his amber cup. Sên Ruben doubted that Sên Toon ever would wander far from his little wife-one's courtyard. Perhaps Chinese-way Chinese marriage was best, after all—for the Sên Toons of China who never had looked upon utmost girlish loveliness on an English canvas.

Mrs. Sên Toon accepted them all, and they all accepted her. She flew her kite as well as No Fee flew hers, and her little fluted laugh was silver as she chased the babe-ones between the graves, or played "butterflies" with them, and played blindman's buff through the pink and cream pampas grasses. Sên Ruben did not envy Sên Toon, not even the feet of his bride, but he thought her a nice little thing. Sên Ruben concluded that Sên Toon's wife would do.

The moon came up in molten splendor before the Sêns lighted their scores of needless lanterns and, having made obeisance once more at their ancestors' graves, went singing home.

As they neared their gates, an unattended horseman passed them. The ladies veiled their faces quickly—all but No Fee. No Fee stood stock-still and watched the sash-wearer squarely as he rode slowly past. Sên Kai Lun's face was thunderous; but thunder never had frightened No Fee, least of all on the face of her father. She caught his sleeve and tugged it hard. "Who is yon lord?" she demanded.

"What's that to thee, plaguesome wanton-one? Cover thy face!"

No Fee whipped a film of gauze-scarf across a segment of her face, and laughed roguish eyes at Sên Kai Lun across it.

"Gods!" muttered Sên Kai Lun. Perhaps he knew what was coming, felt it. And instantly Sên Ruben suspected.

"Who is he? You know him, my honorable father."

"Your dishonorable tool-one!" Sên Kai Lun almost sobbed.

"Hey, he was beautiful," No Fee sighed. "I would wed with him. Send him your *mei jên*."

"Never!" Sên Kai Lun ripped out with an oath.

"I choose it," No Fee told him softly. "Who is he? I will not be denied to know his beautiful, honorable name."

"His name is the name of a toad, his family are thieves, his father is a hyena."

No Fee laughed very softly. "I told you you knew him; the beautiful, beautiful lord-one."

"This person knows him not," Sên Kai Lun said sulkily.

"Tush," said No Fee, "you know who he is."

"Be done, girl. I know him not. But his fox face is the face of the viper Lun Koo Yêh as I knew it long ago. I

shall charge the lictors to chase the toad son of a toad and slay him for his great insolence that he rides him in Sên-land."

"The only son of your bitterest foe, Lun Koo Yêh; that is awkward," No Fee admitted. "*Yah! Yah!* you must send a peace-cup to Lun Koo Yêh—nay, you must take it to him and drink it with Lun Koo Yêh, the father-one of the beautiful lord."

Sên Kai Lun groaned, and Ruben saw that he shook with rage. Almost he feared that the angered man would strike No Fee. She had no such fear, for she knew that Sên Kai Lun could not. But she pitied Sên Kai Lun. She knew how the task she had set him would gall him, and why. She knew the depths of the long quarrel between Sên Kai Lun and Lun Koo Yêh. She knew how his gorge would rise at the cup she bade him drink. She had no thought but that he must drink it to the dregs. But in all her relentless willfulness she found a heart-corner in which to sorrow for the father who never had thwarted her, and certainly must not be allowed to do so now. She snuggled close to her father, and they went in silence, No Fee's arm thrust in his—an unpardonable liberty for the girl to take. But Sên Kai Lun did not thrust her off. Ruben walked beside them sorely in doubt what the end would be; Sên No Fee had none.

Ruben walked alone far into the night, when all the others had gone to their lacquered pillows. Ruben paced and pondered.

No Fee had shocked him, and he had seen that she had horrified Sên Toon's young wife. Mrs. Sên Toon had heard nothing that No Fee had said to her father; only Sên Ruben had heard. But the bride-one had seen No gazing at the stranger and had seen that he had returned it warmly, and Sên Sia Tûtsin had cowered back in her litter, shamed in all her being for her husband's young kinswoman.

Would Sên Kai Lun imprison No Fee in a nunnery? Ruben wondered. Or would he yield and reap the un-Chinese harvest his own weakness had sown? Was it alone the fault of Sên Kai Lun? Or had the brash ways of Young China infected even far-off old-conventioned Ho-nan? Was it possible that rash, hoydenish No Fee could prevail even in this? Sên Ruben's gorge rose against it almost even as had Sên Tûtsin's. He too had seen the stranger give No Fee look for look. Gods! Not so would he, nor his lady permit him to, look into the eyes of his lady of the picture, did ever Kwan Yin-ko, Hearer-of-Cries, grant that he found her.

Oh, to find her!

Too—he pondered and brooded over the words of a witch-woman's prophecy. Strange! Very strange!

At last Sên Ruben went slowly to his sleep-mat. But sleep did not find him soon. Perhaps he had lain soft too long to find within a few moons rest easy on a wooden pillow.

## CHAPTER XXXV

**K**NOWING that the Pepper Month was coming faster than he realized among the queen-time of the roses, Sên Ruben went to the witch woman a day or two before the fish-fight. He would not turn toward England without seeing her again.

Alone Kow Lók was spraying her peach trees when he came upon her. And it was daylight. There was no sightlessness in the eyes the woman turned to him, and they looked at him kindlier. She let him walk beside her, let him chat to her, as she sprayed the peach trees. There seemed little pretense, nothing witch-like about her to-day; just a sturdy old peasant woman working in her orchard.

Sên Ruben spoke to her of China, and she answered not

unpleasantly. He spoke to her of England. She made no answer.

"You have a little vase with a flower-bunch and a wild-gander quill in it in yonder room, old-one," Sên said towards their parting.

"This woman-person saw you eye it the day your fool-one kinsman brought you to spy upon her," Kow Lôk answered pleasantly.

"I would buy it, old-one."

"I will not sell it, White Sên."

"I will pay you big price for it."

"It has no price." But she added, "Why do you covet it?"

"To take it across the ocean, old-one. I have seen its match there, with selfsame flower-bunch in it, and selfsame feather, but of wild goose—in a house of treasures, greatliest treasured."

"Why should not Kow Lôk have her treasure, too? She has no other?"

Sên Ruben had no answer. Kow Lôk went on spraying, moving slowly from tree to tree, Ruben moving with her. A long time they went in silence.

Then, "May I take a message?" Ruben asked her.

"No message." The woman spoke firmly, but Ruben thought that her hand on the spray-brush had trembled. "I have no message to send. But go in peace, Sên Ruben. You have come to do me a kindness. I understand what was in your heart. I will not be ungrateful. Kow Lôk the witch is not a 'dwarf' but a woman of the sons of Han. I shall not be here when next you come to Ho-nan. Many years must pass ere you come. Leave me now, and go in peace between us. I wish you no ill and shall not. I bear you not hate for the hate I bear your Great One."

Because he saw she wished it, Sên Ruben turned and left her; but first, because she was old, and for the little



vase she treasured, Lord Sên Ruben bent low before the peasant woman whom Kow Li had loved in their youth and deserted. And Sên Ruben went in peace, because he knew that she had caught his message and knew that across the world Kow Li cherished a valueless old love token that for no gold would Kow Li sell.

It was to tell the old peasant woman this that he had come again to her peach-girdled nourish-old-age.

She called after him, "Had my peaches ripened you should eat your belly full, Lord Sên Ruben, and take with you all that you could carry. *Yie! Yie!* that you never will taste them: the only peaches in Ho-nan that are not tasteless! There will be no peaches here in this person's orchard when you come again; for when I go to my grave-place, they will rot at their roots, and nothing shall save the peach trees that I saw planted—stones that grew not till I watered them with my sorrow."

Once more she called to him, over her shoulder when he had gone farther from her, "No message, lord-one!"

Ruben answered her, "No message, mother!"

At the gate he turned for the last time and looked at Kow Lôk. She was spraying her peach-trees steadily. She did not turn to look at him.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

ONE thing that No Fee told him in a burst of happiness rather vexed Sên Ruben, and he grumbled of it to his mother in his next letter.

No had had a deal to tell him of her great girl friend C'hi Yamei and it had not attracted Sên Ruben. C'hi Yamei was "emancipated." Ruben was not sure that so-called emancipation along Western lines had improved any Chinese man,

and he was sure that it had damaged and cheapened Chinese women. C'hi Yamei had lived in Europe, her father often made long stays there. When they were in Europe C'hi Yamei went everywhere and did everything just as English girls did—did the dance with men, went to the drama house with them. No Fee thought that admirable and enviable. Sên Ruben did not. And when No Fee cried out in ecstasy that Yamei was coming with her father to visit them, Sên Ruben was exceedingly sorry to hear it.

Half their "flowery" rules would be relaxed, No asserted, while the C'his were with them; relaxed in hospitality's courteous veiling of Sên C'hian Fan's disapproval and detestation of his old friend C'hi Ng Yelü's dishonorable mistreatment and criminal disregard of old Chinese sanctities. Oh! there would be high jinks while the C'his stayed. No Fee was wildly delighted, half off her sleek little head at the riotous prospect. Ruben foresaw the homestead's charm of quiet broken and spoiled; and even for little No's sake he could not be glad that these C'his were coming.

Of course it could not have happened, No prattled on, in the households of many sash-wearers. Many chief-men would not have had it, and few, if any, of their caste women would have brooked it. Sên Ya Tin! Sên Ya Tin their Old-one would have raised the place first! But all his women were tight and flat under C'hian Fan's thumb, and would do and smile as he bade them. Fortunately there wasn't a strong woman in Sênland now—unless she, No Fee herself, was one. Certainly she would be a strong woman after her marriage; no being-under-thumb for her. She'd rule her man, as Sên Ya Tin had ruled hers—and thousands of other such wise and skillful women. And no mother-in-law for her. Long ago she had instructed her father that her bridegroom was to be an orphan. A grandmother mother-in-law was many times worse than a mother mother-in-law, except of course

that a grandmother-one would not live so long to pester one.

Ruben laughed and told her that she was sinful, a sacrilegious rebel—which she was. He did not add aloud that she was also very lovable.

Sên Ruben might have missed the life and home of Ruben Sên, longed for them, if it had not been for his cousin and playmate No Fee. And she was his refuge as well as playmate.

There were things the Sêns did as a matter of course, some that they took keen delight in doing, that rasped Ruben; a few that revolted him.

That is no small part of the Eurasian's tragedy—the inevitable revolt of self against self.

The sports of the younger of the Sên men delighted Ruben and disgusted him. He joined in the polo they still played and excelled in as their ancestors had when it was the favorite game of the T'ang Emperors, and the palace ladies played it too, riding on their swift docile donkeys whose saddles were inlaid and bridles jeweled; played polo often at night, when the night-lantern hung full in the sky, or by the illumination of thousands of gigantic candles. But he watched their cock fights and the to-the-death struggles of their crickets with lack-luster eyes and when he had watched one contest of their fighting fish he had contrived not to see its finish, although he kept his place in the excited ring of onlookers. And after that, whether it gave offense or no, whether they laughed at him and scorned him for it or not, he contrived to have something else to do, somewhere to roam far afield with No Fee whenever a fish fight was on.

Sên Jo Hiêsen was greatly concerned, convinced that Sên Ruben's liver was badly disordered, a sad and dangerous ill to have befallen one so young, and plied Ruben urgently with a parti-colored succession of pills; not nonsensical Western pills, but good Chinese pills the size of small plums and each

deeply marked with characters of good omen and restoration. Ruben accepted them meekly, and would have swallowed them too—or attempted to swallow them—rather than have watched again two infuriated little fighting fish gash and disembowel each other for the amusement of men. But he was able to hoard them in his sleeve instead, and up on the Cherry-Tree Hill he and No Fee played jackstones with them until each and all had rolled away and been lost down in the maiden-hair ferns and clumps of rose-colored pampas grass.

But the day of the great fight between the champion fish of Sên Yolu-sun and that of Sên Pling, No refused flatly to scamper off with Sên Ruben and announced to his horror that she intended to watch the fun herself this time.

“No,” she owned, “women-ones and girls don’t as a rule. But I am going to make my honorable father permit me that I do; and if C’hian Fan forbid it, I know where I can hide and see it all. There’ll be room for two in the hollow trunk of the soap tree, and C’hi Yamei shall hide with me and watch too, for the lord C’hi and my dear one Yamei reach us to-morrow in the hour before the dawn hour. Then the fight begins—unless the rain comes. The fish-ones will not fight if the rain-god spits down—but whoever heard of a rain-time in the Magnolia Month! Yamei will love it. She loves all such brave sights, my lion-hearted beautiful Yamei—and, oh, my heart leapt when Lord C’hi’s runner panted in just before the rice-time and told the message that they were nearly here! I adore Yamei; I adore that she comes. It will be my happiness all the time she is here, and when she goes from me again I shall sicken with my grieving. Yamei! My Yamei! Tell me, Sên Ruben, thou thing of silence and frowns, dost think that C’hi Yamei will come clad in her garments of Europe?”

“Probably,” Sên Ruben said glumly. The more he heard of this strident, emancipated Miss C’hi, the more he disap-

proved her. Little No Fee was merely a rogue and a romp—a wild-flower infinitely dainty and sweet, but his heart was enraged that this Chinese “new” woman was to be permitted to contaminate No. He’d be at the homestead but little while the C’his were here.

“I hope she wears her dress of Europe!” No Fee chattered on. “Never have I seen one of our women in the dress of Europe! A maiden in petticoats! Ya-ya what fun!”

No Fee hid her face in her hands—in mock modesty—and giggled immoderately, winking wickedly at Sên Ruben between her wee slender fingers.

Sên Ruben pleaded a letter to write, and went off to his own pavilion.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

**E**ARLY as the Chinese rise always, the Sêns were up well in advance of that the next day.

Guests of importance were coming.

And one of the two finest of all Sên Pling’s and Sên Yolu-sun’s Burmese fighting fish was going to kill the other.

Two events of such moment electrified the never slothful household. Long before the Hour of the Hare there was more bustle and industry in the big house-core of Sênland than had been since Wash-the-Cats.

No Fee pelted from *k’o-tang* to courtyard, from courtyard to terrace, clambered up into one of the great wall’s thirty watch-towers hours before breakfast rice-time, and pelted back again giggling, half crying, her little gold earrings (that every Chinese woman wears) almost dancing out of her ears.

Sên Yolu-sun and Sên Pling hung over their two favorite fighting fish anxiously. All the other Sên men—masters and servants—were gathered in groups betting gravely but eagerly



on the fray's result. Many of the women and children had "something on" too; and Sên Ruben—privileged to go where he would, do what he would here—filled a wallet with pressed duck and cakes of spiced meal and salted nuts that La-yuên provided him with, tucked a book in his sleeve, and sauntered off unobtrusively to spend most of the day in the camphor grove and to explore a gulch far afield where the wild grapes—ripe now—grew sweetest and the fireweed grew reddest and highest.

He would not see one small demented fish slaughter another, and probably die of its own wounds in agony soon after it had; and he would not meet the C'his until it was no longer avoidable—particularly Miss C'hi. Meet her, he knew that he must, for No Fee had made it abundantly clear that C'hi Yamei would not confine herself to the "flowery" precincts; but he chose to postpone, and proposed to curtail as far as he might, his acquaintance with the emancipated and greatly independent lion-hearted lady. Hers was a type he disliked in English women; in Chinese women he felt it nothing short of an abomination, a desecration of all that had made Chinese womanhood loveliest and China strongest and most admirable and desirable—the country of countries, the race of all peoples.

Out through the first hinted dawning Sên Ruben took his quiet way, soaking his padded embroidered shoes in the heavy dew-drench of the long fragrant grasses. There was mist and moisture everywhere. Festoons and threads of mist hung from the tree branches, the convolvulus kept her lovely flower-cups still twisted close in their night-time spirals; the violets still slept on their green leaf beds. Ten thousand roses slept on bush, wall and trellis, the clover gave out its fragrance a little coldly, the ferns looked chill. Fantastic human-shaped twisted trees—prayer trees, oak trees and gigantic hoary laurels—looked like deformed and desolate ghosts; the tiger lilies showed somber in the gloom-gloom of before dawn; the

turquoise bird still hid under the warm shelter of the castor-bean's broad thick leaves. It was no longer night—it was not yet day. The stillness was exquisite—almost a music in its peace and unbroken harmony.

Sên Ruben trod softly as he went, reverencing the chastity of the young unspoiled day's virginity.

He had thought the star-riven night, when the great sky-lantern hung down a ball of living gold and a nightingale broke its heart in song, the loveliest hours in China's daily cycle of time. Incomparably this was lovelier; Earth bathed in purity—Heaven just apeek through its gray purdah of Earth's sleep-time; peace and silence everywhere.

"Hush!" Heaven commanded. And the world obeyed in utter silence, silence that heard and worshiped but scarcely breathed while China slept pillowed on Nature, a child sleeping on the bosom of its mother.

A tender shaft of glory slit through the darkness.

Sunrise saluted Ho-nan.

And Sên Ruben went his noiseless way where often his father had in his carefree boyhood. Sên Ruben loved it as young Sên King-lo had.

And Sên Ruben blessed and thanked his mother that he was Chinese—that he went here among the sunrise-dappled woodlands, across the fragrant brook-ribboned meadows by birthright.

Sên Ruben kept his tryst with Nature and his kinsmen at the homestead gathered to the fish fight, jesting and betting; and the women, busied in the great house in elaborate preparations for the honored guest that had approached the great gate before dawn, waited while they toiled—waited to hear whether Sên Yolu-sun's fish had killed Sên Pling's or Sên Pling's had killed Sên Yolu-sun's.

Early as it was the lord C'hi and his daughter had come. And when they had taken the sweet hot wine and salted rice

of honorable welcome, Chi Ng Yelü strolled with Sên C'hian Fan towards the amber pool at the edge of the woodland, and old Sên Jo tottered along beside them, anxious to do so noble a guest all honor, and bloodthirstily keen to see the fish fight.

It was a pretty fight; granted! It was a pretty fight the little fish put up—if human eyes that marked it had no compassion.

It was a lovely arena; the amber-edged alabaster pool of limpid, dimpled water, ringed by hundreds of anxious, excited Chinese faces, hundreds of men and boys, blue-clad and brocade-clad figures, leaning over the veined-marble edges that circled the pool—gesticulating, betting. They were betting on the “first blood,” betting on how long both the combatants would be game, betting on how long the victor would survive the vanquished, betting, of course, on which would win—betting on everything that would be, might be, or could be construed to be detail or adjunct of the fight. To a unit their excitement was tense and seething, to a unit they were courteous and good-natured. It was fine fun—the playtime of the Sêns—and, if they took it brutally, they also took it finely and lightly.

Behind the jubilant human throng stood a loose wall of ancient trees—oak, soap, laurel, camphor, giant willow trees, delicate bamboos.

The day-star was near to its rising.

“Yah! Yah!” they whispered hoarsely.

The fish were coming, each carried carefully in his tub of cedar.

Plunk! Yolu-sun’s “Shark” was in the pool.

Plunk! Plunk! Pling’s “Javelin” too was in the arena.

How soon would they sense each other! How many heartbeats before they dashed to combat?—two little gray fish, no

longer than a man's hand, inert, uninteresting and uninterested.

There was awesome silence.

No Fee peeping from her hollow tree-trunk held her breath lest the others hear it; a little frightened by the utter silence.

Sss-s-ez! Javelin was swelling!

He had seen his foe, or smelt him.

Shark moved a tiny fin.

Then they darted.

Gray? Inert? Not now.

They were intensely colored—red, orange, hot violets and pulsing greens. They were iridescent—swelling larger and larger. Tiny threads of flame spurted from their crimsoning distorted bellies.

The fighting fish locked, each gripping with his own the other's jaws.

Locked so, and teeth pierced—disputing every iota of the way—they dragged each other back and forth half across the pretty placid pool.

They were fighting fiercely. There would be no quarter.

Blood trickles trailed them. These little Burmese fighting fish were not "white blooded."

No Fee's hands were icy, flaming red patched her face, her little mouth was trembling.

Old Jo Hiêsen fumbled in his pouch, found an opium pellet and mouthed it; else his excitement must have mastered his manners, caused him to cry out—like a coolie. Several of them—the blue-clad "babies"—were gasping noisily.

Back and forth, up and down, and their blood-trails with them, the struggling fish pulled and pushed.

They leapt far above the water. One of Shark's fins hung by a thread. Javelin's bursted belly belched blood and entrails. But their jaws held.

Under the other, then above him, in turn; turn and turn about they waged their blistering battle mercilessly, unfalteringly.

They fought as if each knew that this first fight would be his last, and had set his fish soul to die the victor.

Suddenly they threw each other off.

Shark turned and darted away—his torn fin dragging red and helpless beside him.

Javelin darted after, panting and exultant.

But the Shark was only feinting. He underturned as the other reached him, and like a sharp knife a pointed, shark-like nose had ripped the Javelin open—open wide from mouth to tail.

The fight was over.

Javelin floated dead and dismembered on the scale-strewn pool of battle.

A little frightened Chinese girl was sickening in the hollow soap-tree.

The servitors were babbling wildly. The Sêns were smiling. It had been a good fight, and Sên Pling was congratulating Sên Yolu warmly as they turned away laughing together.

A coolie leaned over the marble side, netted up the dead fish, and tossed it contemptuously into the fail-bucket—a dilapidated old bamboo bucket—and padded off towards the fertilizer sheds.

With ceremony and adjurations of respect and praise another servant, higher-ranked, finer-clad, netted up the dying victor gently and slid it into the lacquered honorable bucket-of-victory. Scores followed the Shark's triumphant funeral progress. They carried him to the sound of brazen music and the screech and hiss of many crackers. And they would give the very honorable Shark a victor's grave in a violet-bed. He had earned it, and his honorable remains would be of stimulative service to the fragrant violets.



Sên No Fee did not look towards the disfigured water as she slid out of the old soap-tree—she perforce the last to go—and slipped back to the *kuei*.

The day-star leapt above the crinkling horizon, and the delicate bamboos swayed joyously in the yellow sunlight.

One bet and another—all told—two hundred thousand *yuan* had changed pouches since two small fish had met in battle. But that was not much matter; great fun but no catastrophe, for in the essential sense it was one common purse in Sênland. Some of them were poor, some were rich, but there was not a Sên in Ho-nan whose need would not be the give-hour of all the others—succor given gladly, given and taken as a matter of course; as much a birthright to receive as to give, and no less honorable. Nepotism is a sinew of China.

All of which Sên Ruben missed—perhaps weakly, since he had come across the world to see China as she was.

But his day of solitude had laved him, and the tender peace of the early day still lay soft on his face as towards the sunset hour he rose up from where he had been kneeling before the tomb of Sên Ya Tin, and made his slow quiet way to the great dwelling house.

The old Sên graveyard, for all its dignity and monumental pomp, was a spot of almost riotous beauty. Ruben often went there to pray and to rejoice. And he never was there without thinking of the old Surrey churchyard where his father's coffin lay, and wishing that he might win his mother's willingness that at her death he might bring her coffin and Sên King-lo's to Ho-nan and give them Chinese burial here near Ya Tin's tomb in the graveyard of the Sêns. That later when he too went on-High, not divided from them—the mother he adored, the father he could not remember—his sons would put his coffin beside the graves of his father and mother and of Sên Ya Tin the Old-one.

Unless perhaps that he might find and win the maiden he

dreamed of always, there was no other thing which Sên Ruben so desired.

Might it ever be? He wondered.

For he knew that he would not urge it. It was not his mother's consent he longed for, but her willingness.

Sên Ruben was humming an old English love-tune as he came out of the Sên tomb-garden, and turned through the matted bamboos towards the sunset where the great house sprawled like a resting dragon skinned in jewels.

Ah! Some one was coming towards him. His day of solitude was ended—a little sooner than he had wished, a little sooner than he had intended.

"Who the devil!" Ruben muttered it in English. He had not learned to think in Chinese in moments of young annoyance yet.

It was not No Fee, come to find him, and make her peace with him for her long day's desertion. This woman was taller than No Fee, and for all its easy suppleness her gait was graver. It was a Chinese woman—palpably and naturally; for what Western woman save Sên Ruby ever had been admitted into Sênland? But not one of his kinswomen, he thought—though of that he could not be sure until they were nearer—and the sunset blazing through the lace-like bamboos blinded his eyes a little.

He could not escape her unless he turned abruptly and noticeably and went back as he had come; the stout-stemmed bamboos grew too close on either side of the narrow path, little wider or more clearly marked than a goat's track.

No matter. His free time was over now, and he was not afraid of a strange woman, if she was not of him.

She did not seem to be.

Whoever she was she came on confidently, almost as if she chose to meet him.

Sên Ruben wondered how they were going to pass each

other—it would be a tight squeeze! And tight squeezes of that sort were not countenanced in China.

The girl came on, neither quicker nor more slowly.

Ruben almost halted, preparing to crush himself as flat as he could against the wall of notched bamboo trunks that looked so delicate but that he knew were, at their low-down girth, so unyielding.

If he had been quite sure that this was not one of his many kinswomen, with all of whom he was on terms of easy speech, he would have glued his eyes elsewhere as she came upon him. But he was not sure, and did not risk seeming unwilling to speak to a kinswoman who would expect it, odd as it was for any one of them—except wild, spoilt No Fee—to be so far from the house-place, and unveiled and unattended.

And Ruben Sên looked full into the face of his lady of the picture.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

SÊN RUBEN'S heart broke into song; sang an old Chinese love-tune, and his face flooded with a look—an old, old story—that girl-eyes far less world-wise and experienced than the black eyes of C'hi Yamei must have understood.

Almost as it came, Sên Ruben controlled it—drove it away with sheer force of his will and reverence. He pressed back as far as he could against the bamboos, and dropped his eyes, dropped them to make his hot beating heart throb and quiver anew at the sight of the girl's tiny, binded, gay-shod golden-lilies.

Then, remembering that a servant should turn his back upon a noble-one who passed him in the roadway, Sên Ruben made to turn his face against the wall of bamboos.

But C'hi Yamei spoke.

"You are Mr. Ruben Sên," she said in English. "You must be. I am Miss C'hi, No's friend Yamei C'hi," and she held out her hand to Ruben frankly.

Ruben took it—he had to, and as he held the lovely apricot-colored thing in his coarser white hand he knew that he was this girl's for all his life.

He wondered if she felt what thrilled and shocked through all his blood as their hands held.

All his life Sên Ruben would regret sharply that she first had spoken to him in English.

Why had she? he wondered. Some day he would ask her!

Had she, this calm-eyed, low-voiced maiden—peerless here even more than he had seen her in her picture—watched the gruesome vulgar fish fight?

No Fee had bragged and vouched that she would—and would like it!

Ruben winced to think of it.

But he knew that, no matter what she had done, he was sealed to her forever, heart, soul and kindled body.

"It has been a great day at the side of the amber fish-pool." Did her lip curl a little, or did his intrigued eyes imagine it? "You scorned to watch it, No said. Oh, she is very angry with us, Mr. Sên, with you and me; and I am vexed with No Fee—the minx!"

"Angry with you!" Ruben spoke in Chinese—his first words to her—and he did not say "Miss C'hi"—he would not.

Perhaps his ease of the language surprised C'hi Yamei, for she flushed a little and laughed lightly. But she spoke in Chinese too now.

"Sên No Fee is very angry with us both—and for the same one fault, Sên Ruben,"—Ah! the music to him as she said it—"our fault of desertion of her and of the honorable fish fight. I have had to make my day alone as best I could. I

had no liking to stay longer than etiquette compelled me in the ladies' courtyard. They were babbling of the horrid fish fight sickeningly. So—I slipped from them when I could,”—Sên Ruben's heart leapt—“and it has been lovely out here in the wood alone, but I think that I have lost my way—I never have been here before. I am lucky to have found you to guide me back to the house.”

Sên Ruben did not say that the luck was his—the greatest luck he had ever had; but perhaps he looked it.

C'hi Yamei almost smiled as her eyes fell.

“Did then my cousin No Fee watch, as she threatened me she would, the fish fighting?”

“I make no doubt she did. After we had come through the gate of ceremony, made our obeisances for honorable welcome, and had broken our fasting, and the ladies of the honorable harem thought that I lay resting in my chamber, wearied from the jolting of my litter as we came our long way, No, the imp-one, coaxed me out of the courtyard and through the wistaria pathway, through the gardens to behind the amber pool where already your servants made ready for the cruel sporting; and she showed me a cave-like hole in the rotting bole of a great soap-tree, a hole in which we both could have sat, and have peeped through the bamboos growing there, and have seen over the heads of the men—too engrossed in what was doing down in the battle-water to pry with eyes or thought into our screen of leaves—have seen the self-slaughter of the poor little fighting fish down in the pool. She scolded that I would not stay; I scolded that she would not come with me. So I left her there—because I had to. Oh, Lord Sên Ruben, how could No Fee look on at it! It has sickened me but to think of it—to know that it was doing. Little laughing No is gentle as the zephyrs of the Lotus Month. Why, why this naughty freak to-day? For years we have been in friendship—”



Ruben saw the dark eyes fill with tears, saw the red lips quiver as C'hi Yamei broke her speaking abruptly.

"It is over long ago, illustrious maiden," he told her gently. "The suffering of the little fighting fish was brief—always it is so; they fight so fiercely; and in the fury of their fighting it is probable that they do not *feel*."

"I hope so," the girl said a trifle unsteadily. "I would go back to the house, and make my peace with Sên No Fee. Will you lead me the way, lord?"

Narrow as the path was, somehow they contrived to go side by side for most of it; and as they walked they talked.

Sên Ruben was a little scandalized that C'hi Yamei, a high-born Chinese maiden, dealt him such frank friendliness, but it was no flaw in her—she was flawless. The fault was her father's who had given her the ways of Europe—thrust them on her, no doubt, in the nomad years they had spent together in the capitals of Europe.

He liked English ways for English girls, but he felt that they profaned Chinese girlhoods.

Then he remembered that but for C'hi Ng Yelü's strange emancipation of his daughter, he should not have seen her pictured loveliness at the Academy, could not have walked beside her chatting through the Ho-nan woodland as he did with Blanche and Ivy, had with twenty other English girls, through the woods of Dorset and Surrey; and towards C'hi Ng Yelü and his laxness Sên Ruben's heart unhardened. And, too, he owed this hour-of-hours to naughty, willful Sên No Fee; so towards No Fee also his heart unhardened.

They chatted as they went; and C'hi Yamei did not speak to him again in English.

Girlish, lovely, wrapped in soft dignity, she was all that a perfect lily of Chinese girlhood ever had been or could be. What a disloyal brazen traitor, crassly gullible, he had been to have believed for a moment that this peerless-of-all-

maidens would have watched, and liked, the abominable fish-fight! He would do penance for that!—penance at her feet, if he could gain to kneel there.

They went slowly through the sunset, through the bamboo coppice and through the meadows of little, smiling wild flowers.

And Sên Ruben rejoiced that C'hi Yamei was not clad in Western garments.

### CHAPTER XXXIX

SÊN RUBEN'S first move was to pay court to C'hi Ng Yelü, the father of C'hi Yamei, and to win his favor if he could. It is not much use to love a Chinese girl unless you can gain her father's approval. Though he had speech with her freely, and companionship, Sên Ruben realized almost at once that her slight Westernism was but a garment and no part of the lady Yamei; that at core she was as Chinese as he; more deeply Chinese than Sên No Fee. She had called him "Mr. Sên," offered him her hand, spoken to him in English, in exquisite courtesy to a somewhat solitary and presumably homesick stranger in a strange land—an Englishman alone in China, alone in a place and among a people so sharply different from his own that it was incredible that he was not both miserable and awkward. It was her way of offering him China's best and kindest hospitality that had caused her to meet him on English social terms.

He knew that no suitor would appeal to her who approached her except through her father and with C'hi Ng Yelü's approval. Only after marriage could any lover woo C'hi Yamei.

But though courtly, genial C'hi Ng Yelü—on the social surface as cosmopolitan as the daughter—met Sên Ruben's respectful advances cordially, Ruben's design of ingratiating was frustrated.

The "bonfires," as C'hian had called them, of civil broil flared up anew, burst into mightier flames and spread. It looked as if the great war had come. And all the household spoke of little else, even Sên C'hian Fan who indeed, Ruben knew, had thought less lightly of the "bonfires" than he had chosen to own to bellicose but decrepit Jo Hiêsen.

In truth both Sên C'hian Fan's apparent apathy, and his quite sincere desire to keep out of it all, were more a distrust of all the warring factions, dislike and contempt of their leaders, than an altogether slight estimate of the seriousness of China's recurrent and present upheaval. Why fight for any side when all were corrupt?

But, still as undecided as he had been which of all the unworthy leaders (with the just possible exception of Feng Yu-hsiang) was the least bad, the least traitor to the ultimate general welfare of China and her security among the nations, Sên C'hian Fan was sorely troubled now. Each day some runner, or some camp straggler, brought news to the Sên gates that added to C'hian's anxiety without in any way lessening his perplexity.

C'hi Ng Yelü, with a wider outlook, because of his long years of travel and of Western sojourn, shared both Sên's perturbation and his indecision. C'hi Ng Yelü, not yet an old man, was as ready to fight as the next, and as indifferent to death as almost every Chinese man is, but he had no stomach to enroll himself under any leadership he despised—and he saw no other.

Long and low were the counsels that Sên C'hian and C'hi Ng Yelü took together, all the other adult Sên men gathered with them, listening to them eagerly, contributing now and then something to the consultation of the two headmen—all the adult Sên men but Jo Hiêsen and Sên Ruben.

They two were excluded—Jo Hiêsen not suspecting that he was, Ruben rather more than suspecting it.

By C'hian Fan's order, all the war news—most of it more rumor than true news—was minimized to Sên Jo Hiêsen, and when Jo Hiêsen came upon them as they consulted and argued earnestly together they swung their talk to lighter, sunnier themes; not difficult to do in a Ho-nan August where every patch of the great estate was a picture, every vista, every flower, every concerted bird-trilling a book of love songs, a thesis for philosophy. C'hian Fan had no mind that the dear old graybeard should throw his life away upon the field of unworthy battle. Sên C'hian loved the fierce, half-palsied dotard, and moreover it would be a great family calamity were the old man's body lost and not found—and the burial and bewailing, which alone could secure him immunity from Hell and entrance into Heaven, be so made impossible. Then the sons and grandsons of Sên Jo Hiêsen would be deprived of the direct ancestor to worship that is every Chinese's most sacred right—even more important, if that is conceivably possible, than male progeny to bewail and worship them in their turn.

Sên C'hian Fan's reluctance that Sên Ruben should become actually embroiled in the present fighting—fortunately none too near Sênland—was less uninvolved, perhaps less clear in his own mind.

Sên C'hian Fan had thought ill and bitterly of Sên King-lo's marriage. And when she had been among them here C'hian Fan had formed none too high an opinion of Sên Ruby. He had read her dislike of China, her disgust at Sên ways, her pity of Sên women, close as Mrs. Sên had thought that she veiled it from her husband's kindred, and Sên C'hian Fan had disliked her for it. He had deemed Sên Ya Tin over indulgent of the white woman whom Sên King-lo had thrust among them; the only criticism of mighty Sên Ya Tin that C'hian Fan ever had allowed him. And never had he voiced it, not even to his favorite wife; though the favorite

wives in China hear all their lords' secrets—as do favorite wives in the Occident. Yet—C'hian Fan thought of widowed Sên Ruby waiting for her son to return to her, and since the woman, despite her old dislike of Ho-nan, had let Ruben come to them, the Sên felt in honor bound to her that no damage should come to her son so entrusted to them. Sên Ruby herself had written to him, asking him to receive and welcome Sên Ruben. Of course, the Western woman loved her son—one passionately. It could not occur to Sên C'hian Fan that there was a mother anywhere that did not dote upon her son and hold him always in her tenderness; it does not happen in China.

The Pepper Month (Poppy Month is its other name) came nearer and nearer—already Ruben planned to go, C'hian feared. C'hian was loath to let him go, but if he went, let him go as he had come to them, whole of skin and with all his honorable legs and arms and eyes and ears still with him. Moreover, since the foolish foreign fashion of C'hi Ng Yelü, and Ruben allowed it, it greatly inconvenienced C'hian Fan that Sên Ruben should see that C'hi Yamei their girl guest—one was not dull or uncompanioned, and took not peril in the wilder woodlands, near the deep and sudden gorges. Roam them she would, and headstrong No Fee with her. It was evident that C'hi Yamei preferred the outer gardens and the wilder reaches beyond them to the harem courtyards. C'hian Fan sighed heavily to see girlhood so degenerated, but the risk was C'hi's, not his, and it was not for him to chide or remonstrate with a guest who was also his equal, concerning any detail of the other's harem discipline. No daughter of Sên C'hian Fan's could take license of liberty as C'hi's girl—one did, but C'hi allowed it cheerfully, and his host's part was blind-eyed silence. Nor was C'hian sorry to have No Fee's greedy ears no nearer their place of frequent serious conference than the gold-fish lake, the cypress hill, the distant fields



of fireweed. Where C'hi Yamei went No Fee would follow. It was a safety, though a terrible infringement, that Sên Ruben obligingly went with them. On the whole it inconvenienced Sên C'hian Fan as much as it displeased him.

It did not inconvenience Sên Ruben.

And among the globe flowers and the pungent velvet roses, the peonies and the willows, a tiny seed sown on Piccadilly throve and grew like the magic fruit trees of on-High and made a Ho-nan homestead a mystic orchard of the golden peaches of immortality, where the first parent turquoise-birds of all that jewel-feathered tribe mated in the sacred peach-trees.

Truly Sên Ruben found it Heaven; too deep in love now to condemn C'hi Ng Yelü for that lord-one's most un-Chinese laxity.

C'hi Yamei walked among the fragrant-blossomed, fruiting peach-trees sedately; gracious, maidenly and shyly responsive.

No Fee ran and danced apart, giggling like a laughing brooklet for the most part; and Sên Ruben and C'hi Yamei, waiting for her patiently, wiled the waiting with talk. They talked quietly together and forbore to chide her for how long she had kept them when she danced romping back to them.

They talked of flowers and sunrise, of running water and waving reeds—of the rock-crusted mountains, of anemones and red poppies, of the wine-cup of Li Po, of the silks of Hsü Hsi, of the story of the noble Lady of Si-ling, of the lamps-of-mercy that twinkled safely on the mountain passes—talked together of the things that mean most, are dearest and nearest, to the Chinese.

Yamei, speaking softly, told Sên Ruben of her mother who had gone on-High years ago.

Ruben told C'hi Yamei of his mother who was a white rose.

Ruben told her of his sister Sên Ivy, than whom but one maid was lovelier.

"Why when first you said words to me spoke you them in English?" he asked her suddenly one day while they waited for No Fee.

He knew now why she had, but he asked to hear how she would tell it—if she told it.

She did not tell it, but her answer was not untruthful.

"I did not know that you spoke Chinese, Sên Ruben. No one had told me so. No one had told me of you at all, except Sên No Fee—do you think she ever is coming?—and she prattled of you so that the deafness of my ears shut out the sense of most she said—if it *had* sense."

"That is improbable," Sên Ruben remarked gravely.

"It is improbable," C'hi Yamei agreed as gravely.

"But I wore the garments of our people. Would a man do that who did not speak our tongue? Or one who did not prefer to use it?"

"But that follows not, Sên Ruben. In courtesy to your kinsmen to whom you made your visit it might have been that you did that—and a little for your own convenience; not to be the raree-show in a place where never has been seen the dress of Europe, as Chinese gentlemen now wear English tailoreds in Westminster and on the Strand. It is easier to put on a Chinese brocade and girdle than it is to speak and to understand Chinese!"

"It is the tongue I love; the tongue of my father's fathers!"

"That I know now, Sên Ruben; but I did not know it then.—Yah! Listen, you; the pigeons are coming home. Why do they? I wonder why it is that they do. It is not the fall of the dew yet, scarcely the mid-time of the Hour of the Monkey, and rarely do they come till the Hour of the Hen is passing. But it is they. I hear the music of the silver whistles under their tails as they fly!"

Yamei was right; in a moment Sên Ruben too heard the soft fluting of the tiny musical instruments that the harem pet-flock wore; another moment and the pretty iridescent "feather-ones" came whirring over the willow trees and bloom-clotted mock-oranges.

Sên Ruben called them with a fluted "coo" not unlike theirs at mating-time, glad to call them and a little proud that C'hi Yamei should know that he had that Chinese knack. One little bird settled itself confidently on his outheld hand, and then another drifted down on to Yamei's shoulder, considered the girl gravely with its little beads of red-rimmed eyes, saw her cheek so peach-like that it pecked softly at the lovely warm-tinted human fruit, pecked so tenderly with its tender beak that the girl's exquisite face felt it a caress—which in part it was.

C'hi Yamei cuddled it to her face, and it stayed so a moment before it flew away; the bird on Sên Ruben's palm rose to it in the air and they followed the homing flock across the field of wild white roses, flying towards their cotes on the Heaven's-wall of the harem courtyard.

"Would you like to be a bird, Sên Ruben?"

"Nay, C'hi Yamei," Ruben answered, "I like best that I am a man, and where I am."

Perhaps he meant in China, perhaps he meant in Ho-nan, in Sênland, perhaps he meant here with the meadow-flowers and trees abloom—with her.

Perhaps C'hi Yamei knew which of these it was that Sên Ruben meant.

No more than such was most of their talk.

But it grew; and Ruben knew that what had been a boyish dream—the dream of a boy, homesick for a home he never had seen, caught, enmeshed by the loveliness of an unknown face exquisitely painted on a canvas—had grown the para-

mount thing in the soul of a man, the one great need of a man's life.

Did she answer him at all?

Sên Ruben had no idea.

## CHAPTER XL

AND Sênland was emptied when C'hi Yamei's litter was carried through the homestead's great gate. The litter's silken curtains were close drawn but they stirred a little in the crisp September air as the white mules that carried it plodded out towards the hill path that led to the rushing river Wei. This they must ford or ferry before they reached the directer route that led at last to the nunnery of An Mu-ti where C'hi and C'hi Yamei were to tarry a time before they journeyed on to their ancestral home in Shan-si.

Less than a moon later Sên Ruben took his leave of the Sêns, almost as eager to be in England again as he had been to reach China; for C'hi Ng Yelü and C'hi Yamei were going to London in March. He would see them there; and Sên Ruben could not approach C'hi Ng Yelü uncredentialed by his mother's consent and approval.

She would give it, he knew; and he was not without hope that broad-minded, easy-going C'hi Ng Yelü, nomad citizen of the world, would forgive a colorless face and half-blood in a suitor in so many other ways desirable.

It was a wrench to leave China while C'hi Yamei still was there. But he had neither excuse nor hope to see her again in China, unless, after acceptance by her father, the red day of flowers came when he might lift her from her bride chair, carry her over his threshold, and after they had worshiped his ancestors' tablet, alone at last he might lift the crimson bride-veil from her face. In England he could see her freely

—as freely as though she were an English girl; and he was going to England to prepare their way of happiness, their path to bridal; prepare his mother's welcome of C'hi Yamei.

Sên Yamei!

Sên C'hi Yamei!

Two days only remained of his stay in Sênland.

It was quiet now in China. Even *talk* of war was done.

He had made his last obeisance at the grave of Sên King-lo, the grave in which Sên Ya Tin had placed an empty coffin when she had given her grandson's spirit the elaborate ceremonious funeral and burial to which a great lord—one of the Sêns was entitled—or would have been entitled had he not erred and strayed in barbaric sojourn and cross-racial marriage. He had made his last obeisance at the grave of Sên Ya Tin. Again he had kept vigil in the lovely painted temple that Sên Ya Tin had builded in love and honor of Sên King-lo—the temple painted by the yellow roses that clustered in its courtyard and overran its walls of ivory and marbles here and there; by the purple wistaria that clambered across its portal *pai-fang* and flung its sumptuous tassels and its leaves of jade across a jutting edge of its burnished roof; painted by the many-colored dogs and lions and weird-shaped symbolic birds that kept watch and ward on its twisted roofs' long ledges; painted by the yellow sun of China that poured its gold across its bronze, its marbles and its ivories; painted by its brilliant lacquer floor, its cloisonnés, its hanging lotus-shaped lamps, its inlayings of coral and gold and its votive furnishings of flower-holders, incense burners, and jeweled wine-cups on the long prayer-table of malachite.

Sên Ruben had said good-by to the graves, the *pai-fang* and the temple; good-by—"The gods of China be with you"—good-by until he came again.

Now he was saying good-by to the lovely laughing orchards



still jeweled by the reckless profusion of China, although harvest-come was almost done; saying good-by to a dozen rushing rivulets, a dozen tiny bubbling brooks, the placid dozing woodland pools, the waterfall his boy father had swum, the river Sên King-lo had fished; good-by to withering clover and fading violets, to the acres of wild-rose vines of tiny hips and haws, to forest trees and garden-paths; saying good-by to the great day-star above—which would be but the everyday “sun” in England—to the fragrant grass that perfumed his padded embroidered shoes; good-by to the birds that whirred above him, hills, valleys and gorges; saying good-by—till he came again—to all this gracious homeland of his that had so welcomed and warmed him, and that he had wandered in almost hand-in-hand with C’hi Yamei, no longer a painted lady, but the maid of breathing flesh he longed to touch.

He sat a long time leaning against the bamboos that walled the path where first he had seen her. He lay with his face on the searing ferns her foot had pressed in their summertime of green. He dreamed—and his dream was ecstasy; he prayed—and his prayer was hope and betrothal.

The water-clocks were dripping the Hour of the Dog when he came to the house and passed through the long *t’ing-tzu-lang* and across the *ch’ih* to the *kuei* to say good-by to the ladies of his kinsmen’s harem, the gentle Chinese Sên ladies who had been so Chinese-kind to him, and good-by to their pretty host of dimpled babies.

A sound of sobbing checked him at the edge of the harem courtyard.

No Fee lay face down beside the flower-wall, and the women gathered about her were weeping too.

Often he had seen Sên No Fee in a temper, assumed for ulterior purpose usually, though jolly little Sên No Fee now and then flew, for anything or for nothing, into rage as real

as it was vixenish and memorable. But this was grief—the grief of a child whose heart was breaking.

“Hush, pretty maid-one,” a serving-woman pleaded, whose own sobs disfigured her words. “The lady Yamei went on-High from a holy place—”

The broken voice went on, but Sên Ruben heard no more it said.

Sên Ruben stiffened, and leaned against the courtyard wall; his ears were shut. Sên Ruben’s spirit had swooned; his heart was cloistered in pain.

But it passed, for his flesh was strong with the health of youth, and his ears did again their office, and part they heard got through to the wounded mind of Sên Ruben.

“The dear-one of all friendships,” No Fee wailed, “warmth of my heart, twin of my soul! Try not to comfort me, So Sing! There is no comfort for my thought of her passing—my pearl-one, flower of all the gardens. Think of it! Picture it! Caught and torn in relentless bandit hands, murdered for the jewels she wore, the gold in her girdle’s wallet. They tore her ears aslit, tearing the circlets of gold away. They snapped her tender fingers as they wrenched from her the rings! I see them do it! See! See the blood of Yamei pouring down her face! See her hands bleed! Hear her fingers crack!”

Sên Ruben heard no more.

When he heard again it was this: “May all the foul gods wrack the soul of C’hi Ng Yelü, scorch his flesh to its bones, burn his eyes to their sockets till his skull cracks! Foul, inconsiderate, unworthy, that he prevented not that she went alone beyond the nunnery gate, went unattended into the bandit-infested forest.”

Heavily, unsteadily, a stricken man turned and went. He could hear no more!

Sên C’hian Fan, coming from the wax sheds, saw Sên

Ruben dragging himself drunkenly across the temple courtyard, watched Ruben's staggering gait as he went up the temple steps and passed into the temple.

All the night hours Sên Ruben lay in the temple Sên Ya Tin had builded.

Night was chill in Ho-nan now. Sên Ruben felt not cold, nor felt the hardness of the temple floor.

They of the household questioned, "Where is Sên Ruben that he comes not to evening rice? Why keeps he him from his kindred to-night, when to-morrow he goes from our gates, perchance forever?" But C'hian the headman bade them, "Let be! He keeps again a vigil in the temple of his father, worshiping alone at the tablet of Sên King-lo."

And they ate their rice in silence, approving the filial devotion of Sên Ruben. They ate but scantily and drank no wine, for all the household of Sên C'hian Fan was stricken by what had befallen in the forest beyond the nunnery to which C'hi Ng Yelü had taken from here but now C'hi Yamei.

All night long the women wailed. But the men were mute.

## CHAPTER XLI

SÊN RUBEN had not come here to worship or to keep filial vigil; he had come to be alone, had come to escape from the house in which he had heard the shattering news; come for sanctuary. The wounded man had made for his father's temple instinctively, scarce knowing where he went—only knowing *why*, as some wild prey of the chase makes for forest cover to writhe and die in peace.

He did not ko'tow to Sên King-lo's tablet, did not kneel at the altar's votive table. Sên Ruben huddled down on the lacquer floor, rested his head in his hands, his elbows dug on his knees.

The end of his world had come.

He had died a space ago at the house-panel of the *kuei* courtyard.

Life was a husk and a death.

Sên Ruben knew that he was dead; and he wished it even more than he knew it.

The dream he had dreamed mocked him.

The thought of C'hi Yamei stifled him—exquisite, dainty, a stately maiden of soft grave eyes and rose-tinted dimpled flesh, as he had seen her, it seemed but yesterday; Yamei, incomparable, desirable, as he had walked with her in the great outer gardens, and wandered with her beside the bubbling woodland brooks.

He did not think of his father he never had seen, but Sên Ruben suddenly knew that he wanted his mother.

He gave no thought to China, had none of England. Countries, nations, continents, hemispheres, are nothing in the heart of a man grieving his one mate as Sên Ruben grieved, huddled down on the tablet prayer-room's floor alone through the night.

The desolated heart of the man cried out for the mother whose love had been the most of his life and world until he had seen a pictured Chinese maiden on the wall at Burlington House.

A covey of night birds cawed in the lemon trees; Ruben did not heed it. A bat flapped over his head; Ruben did not hear it. A great trunk of twisted wistaria swung and creaked against the roof; Sên Ruben heard but did not hear it.

But he thought of his mother.

His thought of C'hi Yamei, whose bridal veil he never should lift, was long and intimate, and it knifed him. He felt her in his arms, he saw his babe on her breast—thinking bridal thoughts of her that he would not have dared or presumed to think while she lived. Longing and need wrung

him, his very manhood crushing him face-down on the night-chill lacquer floor.

Yet—in his desolation, desire thwarted and mocked on its own virgin threshold, the tortured man was not quite without comfort; for the thought of his mother nursed him and rocked his sorrow in her arms.

He would go to his mother and give the rest of his years—his emptied, widowed years—to cherishing service of her.

His pain would stay, his longing never would be still or lessen, but a great and beautiful living sweetness was left him.

His world was not empty while his mother lived.

At dawn he rose to go. And the thought of his mother brought him thought of Sên King-lo the father of whom he had no memory, but for whom he always had had much and peculiar love—reverence, fealty, tenderness, and great pride.

Had his mother suffered as he suffered now?

Less, it must be, because she was a woman; a thousand times less because she had had her love-life, had tasted and worn marriage in its fullness. She had her living memories; he had but a shattered dream. She had had her wifeness, held and lived it still! She had had her motherhood. For her life had been fulfilled. Life and love had given her what neither death nor sorrow ever could take away. For time and time's eternity her treasure was hers.

He had forever empty hands—nothing but a craving that tore and tortured, the dream of a shattered dream, a chilled-ness that never would go. He had asked for wine and the angered gods had given him vinegar.

Yamei! Never to see her again, never, never to pour his love a perfume over her feet, never to hear her voice rise and fall like a song of golden bells, never even to know that somewhere she walked among the flowers!



Daybreak slivered the inner temple with pearl and pale silver-gold.

And because he thought of his mother who had loved, and loved in marriage that had borne her babes as the rose-vine bears its fragrant satin buds, Sên Ruben made his obeisance at the tablet altar, and lit a score of prayers for the Heaven-peace of Sên King-lo . . . and went out into the tender, new-come sunlight, and turned towards the house.

His kindred took their parting of him at the great gate—the men of his house, and Sên No Fee.

The tragedy that had fallen at the mountain nunnery was not mentioned, nor had it been, in Sên Ruben's hearing. To speed a parting guest with talk of ill-tidings would have imperiled the safety of his journey, made improbable his return, and stained black their hospitality.

They had no thought that it would mean more to Sên Ruben than to any not stonehearted, to hear of such cruel disaster fallen near those who had been here but now. Why should they speak of it to their departing kinsman? He had heard no word of it—so they all thought. Why should he? It was nothing to Sên Ruben.

And he asked no question. He would keep the name of Yamei forever in his heart, but it would vex him sorely to hear it spoken by lips that loved it less than his did.

No Fee lifted her eyes to his pathetically; it might have been in protest at his going. But she did not bid him "Come back to Ho-nan." Perhaps she meant it, wished it, but of them all gathered here to honor his faring-forth she alone did not speak it.

Her face was scarred with tears, and she touched his hand in silence—while their kinsmen looked away lest they see that she did—and Sên No Fee's hand was as cold as the heart of Sên Ruben.

## CHAPTER XLII

RUBEN was laughing gaily when they turned their horses out of Stream-side Lane into the wide gate of Ashacres. It had been a splendid scamper home since the sudden flakes had warned them of the heavy snowfall coming.

Mrs. Sên giggled softly as he swung her from her saddle, giggled and dashed across the wide doorstep, light-footed as a girl, and raced Ruben to the blazing logs in the hall's great inglenook.

"Rue, we'll have snow-balls if this lasts; and won't I pelt you!"

"Think you'll hit me? There—I've brushed you,"—he had, with gauntlets and handkerchief—"down you go!" He thrust his mother gently into the great chair's many cushions. "Tea, dearest, before you change?"

Ruby Sên nodded. "Lots of tea, Ruben; I am famished. I wonder where the others are?"

"I don't," Ruben told her as he pressed the bell, "for I jolly well don't care. Just you and me's a party any old time, Motherkins. I don't want any one else, and you mustn't."

"Just like lovers for all the world," the footman reported to the housemaid of his momentary preference, when he returned to the servants' hall without the tea tray.

They were lovers—Ruben Sên and his mother.

He had kept the oath his broken heart had registered while he kept his vigil of grief in the Ho-nan temple. His life was dedicated to his mother's service, and he served her gaily.

Never should his mother have the hurt of knowing that he had been wounded in Ho-nan.

Sir Charles Snow, coming from the library in search of tea and companionship, saw and heard them, before they knew

that he was there—Ruben lazy on the hearth-rug with his head on his mother's knee, Ruby's jeweled hand threading her boy's hair—and wondered if his task of holding Ruben unwedded, as King-lo had asked him to do if he could, might not prove easier than he had feared.

It seemed to Snow that Mrs. Sên might prove an unconscious conspirator to aid him in carrying out the wish the dying man had entrusted to him.

When the first summertime of sex came to Ruben Sên, no love of mother would tether his heart back from the greater love; Snow knew that never happened—not in the West. But Ruben was, he now believed, so intensely Chinese that his mother always would be the dominant note in all his life.

Ruben looking up and seeing Snow, jumped up quickly though not at all ashamed of having been found curled at his mother's feet, with his head on her lap. He pushed the big chair a little nearer the crackling logs before he rang. Their tea must be cooling by now even under its cosy, and Sir Charles liked his tea almost Chinese hot. When Snow had seated himself, Ruben sat down again on the hearth-rug, bolt upright this time, facing Sir Charles.

"Glad to be home, boy?"

"Splendid to be with you all, sir. To-morrow, if the mater will spare me, I'll take a run up to town and see Kow Li—I have a good deal of family news for him—but I'll be back by dinner time. I can't spare my mother yet—even if she can me."

"He will be uncommonly glad to see you."

"Bring him back with you, Ruben," Mrs. Sên said.

"Thanks, Mater, I'd like to—if he'd come. But would he quite fit in—dear old Kow in an English Christmas home-gathering?—and, you know, dear, Ivy wouldn't like it."

Mrs. Sên sighed softly.

"But she ought to," Ruben added briskly. "But, I say,

Ivy looks to me now as if she'd like anything!" Their mother smiled and nodded brightly. "She must think a precious lot of Gaylor, and he of her, for her to look the way she does. Why, Ivy's face is just one sparkle!"

"She is very happy!" the mother told him.

Snow stirred his tea very slowly.

"Ruben," Lady Snow said, as she pushed through the sitting-room's portière, "your face is the color of a red, red rose. Guilt?"

"Not that altogether, Cousin Emma; blushing from the buffets of December's gale, I wouldn't wonder. It tingled us, didn't it, Mother?"

"It was glorious," Ruby said, "but the wind did cut a bit as we hurried home."

"Sit where you were, Charlie. The fire's too hot for me there; I like this better." Emma made herself very comfortable among the cushions of the wide window seat. "No, Rue, I've had my tea upstairs. But your Cousin Charles is signaling you for more."

"Delicious tea this—for England," Snow said as Ruben took the cup. "Must seem pretty small beer to you though, after what you have been drinking this last year."

Ruben Sên only smiled.

Snow suspected that he did not care to talk about China, and wondered why. He had given Ruben several leads since the boy's return a week ago and Ruben had not followed up one of them. He was gay as a grig and looked and seemed perfectly happy. But there was something—Snow did not know what, but something—he had caught, then instantly lost, once or twice. It was something in Ruben's eyes—or was it in his voice?—not a shadow but shadowy—a reservation. How had it fared with King-lo's son in China?

"Where are Ivy and—her husband?" Ruben asked Lady Snow.

"Goodness knows. They'll turn up at dinner. They don't wear their welcome out, do they?"

"Is he good enough for Ivy?" Ruben persisted.

"Quite—while he makes her happy. Any man is good enough for any woman—and more than good enough—if he makes her happy."

"Will it last?" Sên's voice was openly anxious.

"That, Ruben," Emma Snow said slowly, "no one on earth can tell you. I doubt if the wisest of all the angels up top ever knows that. But it does last sometimes. Tell me, Rue, did you see any girls in China half as pretty as Ivy?"

She would not have made the oblique reference to Ivy's Chinese appearance if either Ivy or Gaylor had been here.

Snow smoking lazily—they all were smoking now—seemed to be gazing idly at the tapestry on the wall, looking at it without troubling to see it; but he was watching Ruben Sên narrowly, listening intently to hear what Ruben would say, and *how* he'd say it, in answer to Emma's question, "Did you see any girls in China half as pretty as Ivy?"

Ruben's answer came promptly and Sir Charles Snow did not catch anything beneath it—and yet—

"I saw one that looked a lot *like* Ivy, Cousin Emma; one of my Chinese cousins, Sên No Fee—pretty as they make 'em in China or out, and a perfect little devil; sweet as sweet, but the greatest imp I have ever seen. There were any number of pretty girls in our *kuei*. The Sêns are not a bad-looking lot. Most of the Sên women are lovely and several of my cousins liked a bit of fun, and took it; but No Fee was the Chinese limit."

"She looks like Ivy, you say?"

"Yes, Mother, very."

"And did you like China, now that you have really been there—seen it?" Lady Snow demanded.

Sir Charles smiled.



"Like China, Cousin Emma?" The question had startled Sên; it seemed to him both inexplicable and fatuous.

"Did you like it as much as you thought you would?" his mother asked gently.

"Yes, quite," Ruben spoke promptly.

"More, even?" There was just a touch perhaps of anxiety in Mrs. Sên's voice. Both the men caught it.

"No, Mother; just as I believed that I should like it."

Snow smiled again.

"I wonder you ever came back," Lady Snow remarked lightly, "and came back so soon too!"

"Nearly a year," Ruben reminded her. "And there is one thing that I love more," he added gravely, "than I do China—one place I'd rather be."

They all knew that he meant his mother, and with her. Ruby Sên's eyes misted in the firelight, and her face flushed a little with tender pleasure.

Ruben began then—resolutely, Sir Charles thought—to talk of other things: friends and happenings in England.

## CHAPTER XLIII

**S**NOW wondered if Ruben would be more inclined to talk about China when they were alone than he had seemed inclined or even willing that afternoon in the hall. Always until now Ruben had seized every opportunity to induce Sir Charles—who had lived in China years ago and who, Ruben knew, was intensely interested still in everything that concerned her—to speak about China; especially about Ho-nan. Would he do so now—when they were alone?

Ruben did not—even avoided the subject, Snow thought.

Why?

Was it because the wonderful place and people had so

gripped Ruben that he had determined for his mother's sake to forget China as far as he could? It might be that, Snow knew. Well—he wished Ruben joy of that task. The man smiled grimly. Forget China!

It was a very British young Englishman that made half the life and mirth of that family Christmas house-party; putting up holly and mistletoe, romping with Ivy—whenever he could detach her long enough from Gaylor, joking with Emma Snow, dancing with Blanche, rollicking with her kiddies, deep in tobacco and politics with Snow and Tom in the smoking-room, hanging about his mother as if “increase of appetite” grew “by what it fed on”; making love to her merrily from breakfast to bedtime.

But Snow knew, quite by accident, something that spoke to him of a strong undercurrent.

The night before Ruben went to London, Sir Charles had risen at midnight to put another log on the fire very quietly. Emma was a salamander—she liked the fire “kept in” in her bedroom in warmer months than December. The husband himself did not dislike a temperature rather more of the East than of England. But you wanted plenty of fresh air in a sleeping-room with a fire going half the night. He'd open the window a bit wider. He drew back a heavy curtain to do so and saw Ruben unlock the small door in a garden wall. The door led directly into the old churchyard. Mrs. Sên had been allowed to have it made for her own convenience. She never failed the rector of church-fund, Sunday school treat, new bell, new carpet or special offering. Why should he fail her of the only request she ever had made of him? The good man had seen no reason whatever, nor had any one else; so, the wall had been cut, and the door put in it.

Ruben was going to his father's grave.

How long would he stay there? But Sir Charles would not gratify his own curiosity as to that. He opened the window another inch and looked for a moment at the moon-lit picture of the old gray church, and its yard of graves. There was snow upon the ground. Berries, that looked like bundles of tiny silver balls in the brilliant moonlight, were thick on the frosted hollies; there was snow upon the graves. It was quiet in the churchyard. Snow drew the long curtain over the window scrupulously.

But Sir Charles Snow lay awake a long time thinking.

Twice after that he knew or suspected that Ruben had gone at night, to Sên King-lo's grave.

Naturally he did not watch Ruben, or pry into it in any way. It was pressed upon him.

"Whatever were you doing, creeping into the house like a mouse at half-past two this morning, Rue?" Ivy Gaylor demanded one day at breakfast. "And how did you get in? Don't the servants lock up properly, Mother?"

The old butler bridled angrily and almost openly.

"Got in the same way I went," Ruben said lazily. "Let myself out, Ive—and let myself in again. Oh—yes, the place was barricaded like a Moscow prison all right. I had to undo about six bolts and chains. Came in quietly out of consideration for your beauty sleep, Mrs. Gaylor. What were *you* doing, prowling about at two-thirty?"

Ivy flushed prettily. "Tom and I got talking in front of the fire—talking over *your* sins, and it took some time. I just went to the window—I like to look at the trees, all covered with snow in the moonlight—and I saw you. Where had you been?"

"Out!" Ruben said with a laugh, and flecked her with a pellet of bread.

Ivy flecked him with another; it had been a favorite nursery pastime of theirs.

Then they both laughed and Lady Snow came in; and the next remark made was about Christmas trees.

The other occasion was as trivial, and as unprompted by Sir Charles.

He had no doubt that Ruben had been to Sên King-lo's grave each time.

It did not seem to Snow at all an English expressing of filial loyalty. And he knew that the graveyards of China teemed with such acts—that scarcely a graveside in China could not have told of much such an incident.

## CHAPTER XLIV

**T**OM GAYLOR'S wife was almost—but not quite—as much sought after in London as Ivy Sên had been. An unmarried heiress presents innumerable possibilities—a fascinating theme. "Which of them will she marry?" Ivy's peculiar appearance had made speculation delightedly piquant. Her marriage ended that. But the radiant young wife was even a more valuable social asset than Miss Sên had been. Mrs. Gaylor's house was delightful in every way, her entertaining yielded pride of place to none.

Society set much store by Ivy Gaylor; she was so unusual, and at the same time so everything that was exactly right. The Gaylors had everything, did everything, and whatever Mrs. Tom Gaylor did, she did to perfection.

And Ivy Gaylor was moderately happy.

Tom was contented—in every way but one. He was a kind and constant comrade, if no longer, after two years of marriage, quite the pronounced lover that the wife, more ardent of nature than he, secretly craved.

The old weak-spot of marriage had found them out, as it usually does: "woman's whole existence," and man's sagging

into tranquil half-time good-fellowship, taking his wife and his home a little for granted if the marriage keeps rather more than the average of happiness.

But marriage had developed Ivy richly. She took what Tom gave, made the most of it, and was grateful. She knew that Tom loved her, that he never had dreamed of regretting their marriage. He spent very much more time with her than most husbands did, in their set. He had not tired of her, even if he had rather outgrown the ebullient endearments of betrothal and honeymoon days. Ivy Gaylor knew that she had a rich portion of what every woman (own it or deny it) longs for from girlhood to death intensely as no woman ever longs for anything else: the ardent devotion and longing of one man—and *its constant expression*. Few women can satisfy themselves with tranquil affection; foolish sex, no doubt, that claims to wear the flowers of Spring and feast on the fruits of frost-ripened Autumn at the same time! Is it perhaps because woman asks so much—over-asks and clamors—that she often receives so little, holds it so insecurely?

Ivy Gaylor knew that her man was not tired of her, but he no longer wooed her, and she was the type of woman that craves constant courtship—an enormously preponderant part of the sex, in the West. Society interested and pleased her, but it did not engross her at all, and amused more than it satisfied. She cared for but three things really intensely: the English countryside, men—greatly narrowed to one man—and little children. Ivy adored babies. She always had. In the most tempestuous days of her naughty childhood and discontented, rebellious girlhood, the companionship of tiny children or a baby to cuddle never had failed to gladden and soothe her, and to turn all her churning bitterness into sweetness.

It was her determination that hers should be a childless marriage. It hurt.



Tom Gaylor, staunch, easy-going, a trifle thick-skinned, always courteous, inclined to be casual, complacent, amiable, far more negative than positive, impressionable but not inflammable, had not fallen in love with even half the violence that Ivy had. She knew it—a girl always knows—and it had jarred her happiest hours. He took marriage, after its first stimulating novelty, at a comfortable jog-trot. It hurt; but she had the wit and the character not to show that it did; she had pride, that best and stoutest buckler of a disappointed woman; she had the sense to realize that her husband gave her all that he had to give; and she had the justice not to blame him for what was not his fault, for what he could not help. But Ivy Gaylor was no more thick-skinned or easily satisfied than Ivy Sên had been, and it rankled.

Still, after two years of marriage Ivy was moderately happy and in every way but one Gaylor was content. "Quite resigned to matrimony," Lady Snow said of him impatiently once. Sir Charles had smiled and retorted, "Sensible fellow."

But Gaylor wished for a son. He was every bit as fond of children as Ivy was, and the one passionate desire of his otherwise tranquil being was for a boy of his own, a girl or two, and another boy or two to follow—of course.

His wife knew, and it cankered.

It made her own not-to-be-satisfied longing a double cross, a longing that whipped her mercilessly.

But her grim determination only hardened as time went. Her English name was a great palliative to Ivy Gaylor. She knew that her own position in the England she so acutely loved was established and secure. But she still disliked to see her own face and the tint of her lovely hands, and she swore that no child should lie in her arms—to look up at her perhaps with her own Chinese eyes set in a baby Chinese face

—a son to be branded as long as he lived with an un-English face, or a girl to suffer as she herself had done.

Love has to be paid for; disobedience has to be paid for—everything has. The heaviest price that any human debtor has to pay is the price of disobedient love.

For the love of Sên King-lo and Ivy Gilbert, beautiful, unselfish, enduring—always fine and pure in itself—had disobeyed a Law. Ivy their daughter had paid a terrible price and was paying it yet—one of the inexorable debts that time and Heaven may forgive, but that can never be paid, and that life never forgives nor forgets. Sên King-lo had drunk and drained his hyssop; Ruby Sên had tasted it; for Ivy their daughter it brimmed in a cup always at her lip.

It stung and was bitter, just a drop or two, on Tom Gaylor's mouth now and then, though he never had suspected it, probably never would, and by no mental or spiritual effort could have understood, had you told him all about it, what in the world all the ridiculous pother was about.

Gaylor considered his wife the prettiest thing in London, a judgment in which he was far more acute than he often was.

Gaylor was proud of his "Chinese" wife. But he wanted children inordinately, if the most natural of all human wishes ever can be called "inordinate"—the desire and instinct that of all human desires is fullest or emptiest, best or worst, in fulfillment. The gamble of marriage is small, and its retributions are puny compared to the gamble and retributions of parenthood.

## CHAPTER XLV

"TWO new friends of mine are dining here to-night," Mrs. Sên told Ruben one April afternoon. "I think you will like them. They are particularly charming."

"One of your grand crushes, Mother?"

"Who ever heard of a crush at dinner—except in a cheap restaurant! Don't be silly, Rue," Ivy broke in mockingly.

"I apologize, Mrs. Gaylor."

"A very small dinner," his mother said, and changed the subject without saying who her guests at dinner that night were to be.

"You and Tom coming?" Sên asked his sister, as he rose to straighten about her the fur she took up as she went towards the door almost abruptly.

"Not me! Too select!" Ivy's voice was tart. "And we are not invited," she added more pleasantly as Ruben opened the door. "Good-by, Mother. I'll tell Lucien about the underskirt."

"And I'll be back as soon as I have conducted Mrs. Gaylor to her car," Sên said over Ivy's shoulder as he followed her into the hall.

Ruby Sên drew her chair a little nearer the flaming logs. Ivy's tone had chilled her, and the English April was cold this year. The woman sat very still—a trifle huddled—and her dark eyes were shadowed until Ruben came in again.

"Worried, Mother?" Sên came and laid his hand on her arm.

"No, dear—no," she answered quickly, almost too quickly.

"You looked it," the son told her gently. "Pass it over to me, can't you? That's what I'm here for, you know."

"You are here for everything good and helpful and a joy to your mother, my Ruben. There is nothing to pass over—truly."

"Then I'll pass over mine." He drew a chair close to the fire too, and seated himself facing his mother. "What's up with Ivy? Something hipped her just now; what was it? She was snappy with me in the hall and scarcely told me good-by when I had tucked the rug about her. I loved our

old Ivy no end, but I like the new Ivy best. The old Ivy peeped over the new Ivy's shoulder just now—the first hint of one of the old hard moods I've seen since I came back. It worried me and I think it worried you. Isn't Ivy happy? She and Gaylor hit it off still, don't they?"

"Of course they do. Wonderfully happy!" And again Ruben, who knew her so well, thought that the mother answered almost too quickly.

Not to force her confidence, but because he was determined to share whatever it was that was vexing her—he was sure that there was something—he went on questioningly.

"I say, Mater, Ivy wasn't put out at not being asked to eat here to-night, was she?"

"What nonsense—of course not. They are dining at the Giffords'—she and Tom—and going on to two or three places after that. Ivy doesn't want to dine here every time I have a few people, any more than she wants me every time she has guests. They have their own set—Ivy and Tom. I have thought once or twice lately that Ivy wasn't feeling quite up to the mark. I dare say she has overtired herself. She goes and does so much, and does everything at such a pace."

"I think it was something about dinner here to-night," Ruben insisted.

"Well, then—it was," the mother owned reluctantly, but with something of the relief of confession in face and voice. "She wouldn't have dined here to-night if I had asked her—which I was careful not to. Ivy heard me tell Jenkins the order for the table cards, and she does not approve of whom I have asked to-night."

"But, I say!" Sên blurted out hotly. "That's a bit *too* stiff, Mater. I wish I'd known, and I'd have snapped young Mrs. Gaylor a good bit sharper than she snapped me out in the hall; and her chauffeur could have done her tucking in for all of me! Not approve—well, I'm blowed!"

Whether Ruben was blowed or not, he was angry. All his life he had brooded over his sister and loved her devotedly, but that she should dare to criticize their mother's social judgment infuriated Sên Ruben.

A more English son, every bit as devoted to his mother as Ruben was, would have been disgusted and amused; Sên saw red.

Mrs. Sên laughed.

"She can't help it, dear. And we mustn't mind when it breaks out. It is awfully silly of Ivy—but there it is. It's her cross still, I'm afraid, our poor little, foolish Ivy."

Sên caught the situation instantly. "You have asked a Chinese to dine here to-night—for me! That was dear of you, Mater. A 'varsity friend of mine?"

"No one you know. Two Chinese—perfect dears both of them. I met them only last week at Rachel Ridley's. And I called the next day—and I asked them to dine to-night, and wouldn't take no for an answer. I haven't had as many of our country people here"—her son's eyes smiled worship and gratitude into her eyes—"as I ought to have done, Rue; not as many as I wanted to—because of Ivy, you know. But she's got her own home now and I do not mean to debar myself from the pleasure of having friends of my husband's countrymen and women any longer, or to debar you from having your Chinese friends about you in your own house. I haven't always been quite fair to you about it, dear, in the past; it was difficult, you know."

"Very," Ruben said softly.

"Well—it's different now; Ivy is married; she must gang her ain gait, socially, and we'll aye gang ours. Now, I want to tell you all about these new friends of mine, Rue. I need not ask you to be nice to any one I have here, but I want you to be particularly nice to these two Chinese friends of mine to-night. You won't find it hard. You see, they are such



strangers here; they only left Ho-nan a few weeks ago. Welcome them, Ruben."

"Welcome them—just from Ho-nan!" An inscrutable something pulsed in his eyes. "You bet I will!"

"Order! Order!" Sir Charles exclaimed as the Snows came in unannounced. "No loose language in the presence of ladies, young cub."

In the small talk of Lady Snow's stay no more mention was made of Mrs. Sên's Chinese dinner guests, and when Sir Charles, despairing of the business talk concerning tenants, repairs and investments that he had come intending to have with Ruby and Ruben, reminded his wife of a dinner engagement of their own, and they went even more unceremoniously than they had come, Mrs. Sên had no more than time to dress leisurely if she were to run no risk of not being in her own drawing-room safely before the arrival of some first and over-prompt guest.

Who were they, Ruben wondered as he knotted his tie, the two Chinese who were to dine? From Ho-nan. His face tightened. Ah, well, they should have warm welcome from him; a Chinese welcome. Ho-nan was a wide place, and not too well interknit, but perhaps they knew his kindred. However, it was not probable, for they would have said so to his mother, and she to him.

Ho-nan—it hurt to think of Ho-nan! But he always did. Sên Ruben's wound had not healed.

Still, in woe as in weal, a man is a man, and a Chinese man must have his laugh. Ruben chuckled as he slipped into his dinner jacket, and grinned to himself as he gave his well-brushed hair a last survey in the glass. To think of what those two Ho-nanese men must have felt when Mrs. Sên King-lo had called upon them! He'd never known his mother to do that before—call on men. Almost complete strangers too. It was perfectly right, of course, or his mother

could not have done it—*she* never blundered—and it was jolly kind of her into the bargain, bless her! But if, as he thought from what she had said, these were *Chinese* Chinese, here in Europe for the first time, and probably quite unacquainted with Western ways, it must have given them quite a jolt when an English lady had paid them a visit. Perhaps they did know something of the West though. Certainly they must speak English, or at least French, for the Mater to have found them particularly interesting and charming. She could not speak a dozen words of Chinese, and Ruben doubted if she understood a score.

It wasn't worth puzzling over; he'd know before long.

"Come in!"

Kow Li came in. Sên gazed at him in staggered amazement. Kow Li wore the livery of a Chinese house-servant; the severely plain blue gown, the humble black-cloth shoes, the servant-crest of the Sêns "chopped" in white on his shoulder. His long queue was beautifully braided and, eked out with silk threads, hung down to the hem of his robe.

Kow Li was beaming; Kow Li's old crinkled yellow face was radiant.

"What the devil's the joke, Kow?"

"Not so, my eminent lord-one. Your worm that crawls in your perfumed presence has been permitted by the most noble lady, Sên Ruby, a very great and desirable honor to-night. I am waiting at table, my lord."

"The hell you are!"

Kow Li bowed, his hands meekly hidden in his sleeves.

"Look here, do you mean it, Kow?"

Kow Li bowed lower than before.

"Well—you are not! You! It won't do, Kow! I will not have it. I don't know what you are up to, you old monkey-one; but I will not have it; that is fixed."

"My lord," Kow's voice trembled a little in his eagerness,

but Ruben saw that the old man's eyes were firm; it was Chinese will against Chinese will! What did this unprecedented freak mean, anyway?

"My lord, whom always his servant has loved and has served, I was your celestial lord father's servant. Many a time his foot has pushed me—"

"I don't believe it!"

Kow Li smiled, as if affectionately at cherished, happy memories. "Never unduly, my lord-one. Ever was that noble-one a just and often an indulgent master. But I was his servant, and he ruled me."

"Well then, I am going to rule you to-night! What does it mean, Kow? What are you up to?"

"O lord-one, a very great Chinese gentleman eats your rice to-night—"

"He won't think much of it, if there is *rice*—English-cooked rice!—on our menu to-night. I'll give him a tip to cut out the rice course."

Kow Li grinned too. But he continued sedately—Kow Li was very much in earnest. "Thy servant Kow Li, Kow Li the servant of Sên King-lo, has often the gnaw of lonesomeness, up in his elegant rooms in the Bloomsbury. He makes not free with his servants—least of all with those estimable business subordinates, Mug and Wat. A Chinese master and servant may be friends, sometimes even comrades, in China, but it seems not to work to any advantage in this the West. The merchant who permits the familiarity with his clerks, his business employees, loses his grip of his warehouse and his coin-pouch; rides indeed a tiger. I have been too busy and too engrossed amassing wealth for the son of my master—the son who when a babe-one gave many a smile of affection to Kow Li, his father's servant—too occupied so, O Sên Ruben, to seek friends of my race on the outer side of my house in the Bloomsbury. And so has it come that this old

Chinese, living alone so far from the garden of Ho-nan, aches sometimes for companionship. I would stand behind the eat-chair of the noble who comes here to-night, I would be again, for the short space of time that a brief and inadequate English-wealth meal occupies, what I was in my younger years, what I *am* without its pleasant privileges—the Chinese servant of a Chinese gentleman. And, I charge you, O Sên Ruben, it is not a thing respectable that no Chinese servant waits in proper attendance upon the Chinese guest in the house of Sên King-lo. They are louts—the serving-men English! Your butler has effrontery of hollow pomposity; he knows not how to wait with meekness; never he effaces himself, the butler-one of an establishment of English wealth. The footmen! They are not servants, the servant-ones of the West. The make-go of the tram-car they can do, they can pack the travel-box, and make the beer-drink, but they cannot fill up the wine cup with decorum, or pass the salt-bowl appropriately with accuracy and civility. Grant that I take my old place to-night in the rice hall of the Sên. Deny me not, my lord!”

“Does my mother know?”

“She, at my prayer, permitted me the happiness, my lord.”

“By Jove, I must go”—the clock on the mantel was chiming—“or she will permit me the taste of her stick. You are a rum old bird, Kow!”

Kow Li tidied Sên Ruben’s tousled dressing table lingeringly, set a flower at a better slant in a vase, altered the place of a chair, scrutinized the bed, put out the electric lights—one should not waste of the honorable gods-permitted abundance—and closing Sên Ruben’s door behind him went gravely down to the dining-room.

He disapproved its appointments—but he had seen many Western rice-rooms.

As for Mrs. Sên’s irreproachable butler, and all his bevy

of spruce, important and immaculate footmen, Kow Li ignored them. And they left him alone. Mrs. Sên had given her orders.

## CHAPTER XLVI

**A**N early guest or two were there already when Ruben reached the drawing-room. He had delayed himself longer than he had realized with Kow, and he had gone to the conservatory for a flower. Other guests were announced as he shook hands with the Raeburns. Sên had no opportunity to ask his mother even the names of the Chinese men who were coming. Not that it mattered. Chinese surnames presented no difficulties to him; he knew all the hundred of them by heart, knew which was the home province of each, which were the most distinguished in China's history, and for what.

Whoever they were they would be welcome to him—but it would stir a sore memory! Never mind; that would happen often, and be but a small price to pay for the treasure that his memory held forever.

The girl he was chatting with laughed a trifle shrilly as Jenkins made an announcement. Sên did not catch it.

Mrs. Sên called him to her; and Ruben turned to her and was face to face with C'hi Yamei.

A cry, that neither four years at English public school nor centuries of Chinese self-control so much as muffled, startled Ruby Sên—and amused their English guests. C'hi Ng Yelü, standing just behind his daughter, may have wondered what Sên meant, but two women knew instantly.

Ruby Sên's heart sank. She had heard the self-same note in Sên King-lo's voice years ago—when he had wooed her beside the blue Potomac.



She admired her husband's people enormously. Her own mixed marriage had been unbrokenly happy. But—she was not ready to give Ruben up yet. And she always had counted on Ruben marrying an English girl. How Ivy would hate this! Nor, frankly, did she wish a Chinese daughter-in-law and grandchildren preponderantly Chinese by blood.

It did not occur to Ruby Sên that, by any possibility, Ruben might fail to win any girl he chose. And she believed that he would woo but one. Miss C'hi seemed much less charming to Ruben Sên's mother than she had at Lady Ridley's.

Sên made no gesture even to greet Mr. and Miss C'hi. He was ghastly white and he had clutched at a chair-back, as a frightened girl might have done. Speak any word he could not.

C'hi Yamei held out her hand, laughing lightly. "You are surprised to see us, Mr. Sên? But we told you we were coming to London in April or March, didn't we, Father? Hadn't Mrs. Sên told you that she had asked us for to-night?"

Sên let her take his hand; it amounted to that.

As her hand slipped itself into his, color swept back into his face. Her flesh was real and very sweet. This was no girl-ghost come to him from bandit-infested An Mu-ti. Whatever the hideous mistake had been—the mistake that had broken him, scorched all his manhood's future into ashes—this *was* Yamei. She was clad in English clothes, as he had not seen her in Ho-nan. And she spoke to him again in her easy fluent English that had jarred him in the bamboo path and that she had not again used in his hearing in Ho-nan. But this was the girl he had worshiped in China, changed in nothing but a low-cut evening-gown, hair that had neither stick-pins nor ointment, and a quiet prattle of English small talk.

Sên murmured something in reply, speaking too low for even Mrs. Sên and C'hi to catch it. Perhaps C'hi Yamei

knew what he said—women are clairaudient at such times—but certainly Ruben himself did not. But he pulled himself together somewhat, though awkwardly, as a criminal reprieved from the death-sentence might on the very scaffold, and made shift to speak to C’hi who was waiting to greet their young host.

The touch of Yamei’s hand had told no message, but it had told great news—she lived, and it had given him strength and social reassurance.

It was too late for Mrs. Sên to remake her dinner seating arrangements; she regretted that it was.

“Why did it startle you so to see us again, Mr. Sên?” Yamei asked, as they went towards the dining-room.

She felt his arm shiver a little under her glove, and she knew that he did not look at her as he answered—for she was looking at him.

“I had heard that you were not living,”—his voice was thick—“that—that you had been killed at An Mu-ti—in the woods near the nunnery.”

“Oh! You heard it too, then! No Fee said that you had not. We were at your kinsmen’s again, for a brief stay, as we went down to Hong Kong—and—No Fee just happened to mention that you had heard nothing of the rumor.”

The man’s heart leapt at the shyness that came into her voice.

“Thank God that it was only a rumor!”

“But it did happen,” Miss C’hi told him sadly, “but not to me. It was another C’hi Yamei—a collateral kinswoman, Pin C’hi Yamei, not a near cousin. If we were in China we should be keeping our year of mourning for her, of course; but my father decided against our doing it over here. White mourning would not have looked mourning here; and it would have been a great inconvenience to my father—and rather absurd, too, in the English clothes he prefers to wear over

here. And black would not have been mourning to us."

"Of course not!" Sên said quickly. It pleased him to hear C'hi Yamei say it. And it pleased him to think the frock she wore—that any English girl might have worn on such an occasion—was her concession to C'hi Ng Yelü's regrettable Europeanism, and not her own willing acceptance of "low neck and short sleeves."

He looked at her now and he saw that her lips trembled a little; perhaps because she had been fond of the other Yamei who *had* died at bandit hands, or perhaps in recalled horror at the hideous cruelty of that other Yamei's death. And he spoke of something else as he seated her at the long, glittering table. His quivering excitement calmed to a manageable thing in his determined endeavor to banish a troubled memory from her mind.

"The first time we have eaten together, isn't it?—except picnic snacks in the woods at home," he said lightly. But he added, as significantly as he dared, "I am glad that it is *here*."

Miss C'hi nodded brightly. "You call it 'home'—Ho-nan?"

"Always! It is my home," he told her in Chinese, "and I am Ho-nan's loyal child, in exile. Do not you call China 'home' always, C'hi Yamei?"

The Chinese girl's face flushed beautifully, and Ruben saw her black eyes' sudden softness. "Yes, Sên Ruben; no matter where we go, no matter how long we stay in exile, always China is my home—my only home. But," she added in English—English that, except for the music of her voice, was perfect English—"I like my exile in this jolly, friendly England—your mother's country, Mr. Sên. I find England delightful and English men—and women—kind and charming."

"Yes," Sên admitted, "it was my mother's country—until her marriage."

C'hi Yamei smiled at Sên's reminder and at its assertion. She liked him that he would not compromise.

"You like English men better than you do English women, then, Miss C'hi?"

"How have you jumped to that conclusion, Mr. Sên?"

"No—you told me."

Miss C'hi denied it with a crinkled lip, and a questioning lift of her delicate very black eyebrows, eloquent and unambiguous.

"But—yes; you did," Sên insisted with a laugh. "You said, 'I find English men—and women—kind and charming.' You hesitated before you added 'and women' and your hesitation qualified it."

"Are you a barrister, Mr. Sên? Such a gift is badly wasted, if you are not. You would be deadly in cross-examination. Perhaps I have liked English men even better than I have English women, but I have not suspected that I did. I have met so many more men than women over here," Yamei laughed softly. "And I seem to have come more quickly in touch with them, and more sincerely. I think it is because all nice women in the West have to keep themselves a little 'stand off,' out in the general world as they are; hold themselves a little aloof, making so for themselves a high wall of dignity that at home we need not think of, because our barred courtyard walls make it for us."

"Which do you think the best way," Sên asked gravely, "the women's way of living here, or at home?"

"At home," C'hi Yamei answered promptly. "I enjoy my freedom here in England and, because my father wills it, I do not question it. But I take it and enjoy it as an episode—just a lark—as a Chinese lady likes and is amused by her wide license at the Lanterns' Feast once a year. But I do not find it really 'freedom,' the living outside of the courtyard as one does here. I do not find it really a freedom be-

cause one must so be on one's guard always. I find that I cannot quite approve it, Mr. Sên, and it is not always that I am able to enjoy it. I feel here that always I am on sentry duty outside the camp of my own personality."

"With me? Talking here with me, in my mother's house?" Sên broke in.

"Of course," the girl asserted with a tiny teasing laugh. "I believe," she added gravely, "that there is more true freedom in a Chinese *kuei* than in any English drawing-room or at any Western function. Yes," she went back, speaking slowly, "perhaps I do like my English men friends a little better than I do the English girls and older women I know. Probably that is a sort of vanity; for I know that the men I meet here like me better than the women do."

Sên laughed softly.

Miss C'hi did not pretend not to understand him perfectly, for she said at once, and quite seriously: "Yes; that, of course, is inevitable. There can be no chance, because no cause, for jealousy in the Chinese flowery quarters; while there must be jealousy, a strongly armed neutrality, at best, among women who do not 'stay at home' and are not 'shut in.'"

Sên Ruben had not thought of that ever. He considered it gravely for a moment. It staggered him rather. Yet, as he threw his mind back to the courtyards of his kinswomen at home, he saw C'hi Yamei's point, and his intimate memories of Sênland gave her startling argument strong support.

More freedom—for women—in a Chinese harem than in London society! Distinctly that was a new thought. But Sên suspected that the more he thought it over—presently at his leisure—the more convincing he would find it.

And so it proved.



## CHAPTER XLVII

MISS C'HI changed their talk to lighter things then, feeling, as Ruben Sên suspected she did, that further comparison between them of woman's welfare and comfort in East and in West was something of a discourtesy to her English hostess—especially comparison concluded in China's favor.

To C'hi Yamei Mrs. Sên was altogether English. No one else ever had thought of Ruby Sên as anything but English—except as Sên King-lo's love and Sên Ruben's had strained to call and to think her, arbitrarily, Chinese. Sên King-lo had realized, more fully after their marriage than before it, that all her easy acceptance of much that was Chinese—an acceptance that had been proud and sincere in Washington and London, and even in Hong Kong, but that had been altogether breached by the really Chinese conditions of their stay in Ho-nan—had been partly the deep congeniality of her personality and his, partly her warm and sunny affection for him, partly accidental and superficial. Ruben their son never had quite realized it; he believed his mother far more attune with China than she really was; he attributed her unwillingness to live in China to her reluctance to leave Ivy; and now that Ivy was so happily married he dreamed again of a day to come when his mother would be the *doyen* and regnant one in the *kuei* of his Ho-nan home.

Ruben Sên thought of his mother as Chinese, partly because his mind could not divorce his ideal woman from his ideal country, partly because to his intensely Chinese mind a wife *was* of her husband's family, and the descendant of her son's ancestors—the descendant of his paternal ancestors. Such is the compulsion and force of absorption of Chinese

character, that every race that ever has conquered the Chinese has been conquered more vitally and permanently by the Chinese—has *become* Chinese. The unanimous history of the long centuries proves it—of all China's past; perhaps predicts it of all China's future, the greatest alchemy in human history. To Ruben Sên's mind in just that way was every woman reborn, recreated, reblooded by marriage. He could not think it otherwise.

"Your Chinese butler, standing there behind my father, looks as if he never had left China for a day—not for an hour," Miss C'hi said presently, when she and her host each had been duly courteous to their other table neighbors. "And I seem to know his face—to know it at home. Have I seen him in China, I wonder?"

"Not unless you are older than you look. Kow Li has not been in China for nearly half a century. But he was born in Ho-nan, at our place there. You must have seen brothers and nephews of his among my kinsmen's servants."

Ruben had known as he drew back Miss C'hi's chair that Kow Li instantly had recognized her—known that she was the lady of the picture whose original they had so tried, and so in vain, to trace. Trained to immobility by sixty years of service, yet Kow Li's face had betrayed him to Ruben's eyes at the threshold of the meal. Kow had not started, Kow had given no sign, made no gesture; but Ruben had seen joy leap in the old man's being. And Sên knew that Kow Li was parching and tingling to be alone with him and talk it over.

Stickler as old Kow was, staunch conservative concerning all things Chinese, Ruben wondered how Kow thought of C'hi Yamei's English dinner gown. Once, at something he'd said to her, her dimpled shoulder had shrugged lightly with a very Chinese motion. Ruben Sên had shivered at the warm

loveliness of that naked girlish shoulder, at the unveiled beauty of her arm; Sên Ruben had disapproved—and longed. How did it impress Kow Li?

“So!” Miss C’hi said. “I should like to speak to him—your Chinese servant—some time, if Mrs. Sên would allow me. I must tell my father that it was a Ho-nanese that filled his glass. Father will like to hear.”

At that, Sên told her Kow Li’s story and ended by telling her how the old Chinese who had followed Sên King-lo into Western exile—he a young man, Sên King-lo not much more than a boy—had been Sên King-lo’s body servant for many faithful years and now, one of London’s rich men, stubbornly held himself still the low servant—one of Sên King-lo’s son.

C’hi Yamei’s black eyes misted at the story. It was so Chinese a story. And as Ruben finished, leaning a trifle forward in her chair, she looked Kow Li full in the face, gave him a gracious little nod and smiled at him in cordial and open race friendliness.

Kow Li’s immobility broke up; Kow Li showed emotion now! The mask-like face crinkled with joy and gratitude; and the old black eyes held proudly the young black eyes a long instant’s length before Kow Li tucked his hands within his flowing sleeves, drew back a space and ko’towed profoundly—colliding as he did so with an outraged footman and a salver-borne brace of sauce-boats.

C’hi Yamei had gained a serf.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

NATURE had her way; Nature outwilled and outwitted Ivy Gaylor.

For some time Ivy locked her new secret fast—her rage, her fear and her intense joy.

When it grew too big for her she took it to Emma Snow. And again Lady Snow did her best by the distracted, frightened girl.

It was not the common fear—fear of physical pain, so often the cross of Western approaching motherhood—that racked Ivy Gaylor. She was too Chinese for that; in spite of herself, her splendid Chinese blood that she so hated and rejected told sometimes.

“I shall kill it, if it looks like me!”

“You will love it dearly, no matter what it looks like, Ivy,” Emma Snow told her crooningly.

“They do it sometimes—quadroons—don’t they?”

“I think so—sometimes,” Lady Snow admitted.

“Poor little thing! Poor little unwanted baby! How unfair! Can God be so fiendishly unfair, Cousin Emma? It is only one-fourth Chinese, and three-fourths English, my poor little baby!”

A lesser woman might have chided, “Hush, Ivy!” but not Emma Snow.

She put an arm about the other’s heaving shoulders.

“God seems a long way off, dear, sometimes. But He never is. God shows us all the mercy He dares always, I am sure. I don’t know much about Him, Ivy. I doubt how many down here in the fog of life do; only the saints, I think, if even they. But there are facts concerning Him that He teaches us all, shows us clearly, if only we will let Him, if we will learn and will see—all of us who live as long as I have. He has taught me that, Ivy, about Himself. God helps us, all that we will let Him, and more, I think. Sometimes He *has* to punish us to do it, but always, I am convinced and sure, He gives us all the mercy that He can. Take what He sends—in October. Take it as a beautiful gift. Even, if it should be the cross you fear, accept it gratefully. When we do that the heaviest cross grows light. It is carried for us,

dear. And you will not hate your little baby. You will not be able to do that. Don't try to, for you can't. But you may injure yourself—and it—in trying to. Of course you want your baby, Ivy; every woman does—you more than many girls I have known. And I'm sure that it will not be an unwanted child to its father. Think of Tom, Ivy. Don't spoil his pleasure in your firstborn."

"Poor Tom!" Ivy sobbed. "He wants a child terribly. But he has been sweet about it—oh! so sweet. He has never spoken of it, except at first. I am sure he has suspected that I did not mean to give him a child and that it has hurt him. But he has not begged or teased, or anything like that—not once. He has been so splendid. Why did I marry? I ought not. I wish I had never married."

"Yes indeed, Tom has been splendid—from what you tell me. It is up to you to pay him. A defaulting debtor is a poor, cheap thing always, but in the debts of marriage only skunks default. You won't! Why did you marry? That's easy. You married because you had to. I suspect that's why the majority of us do."

Little by little the woman soothed the girl—measurably. But she could not reassure her, perhaps partly because Lady Snow herself secretly shared Ivy's apprehension and revulsion. Ivy Gaylor could not be comforted—yet. Lady Snow wondered sadly if the child, when it came, would have the power to comfort its mother—if it came as Ivy so feared it might, looking of the race whose Eastern blood was but a fourth of its life stream. Would Gaylor's love hold—if that happened? Would his love of his wife hold; would the child find its birthright place in his Englishman's heart? Emma Snow was greatly troubled.

"Does your mother know?" Emma asked softly.

"No!" Ivy told her roughly. "And she shall not as long as I can help it. I have been so happy since Tom came that I



thought I had come to love my mother; almost had forgiven her. Now I blame her more than I ever did before. I hate her!"

Emma Snow was crying softly. She could not help it. Nor could she speak a rebuke she did not feel. "Honor thy father and thy mother." Yes; but— Another commandment burned in her heart—"Ye fathers, provoke not your children to anger." Emma Snow believed it greater, more binding, more sacred than that other commandment given at Sinai.

For a long time neither spoke.

When she—Lady Snow—did break their silence it was of Gaylor that she spoke, for his tranquillity that she pleaded, Ivy's duty to him that she urged. The child would win its own welcome, or never be welcomed, the woman knew. She could not help there. But the man whom Ivy loved, the husband of whom Ivy was not ashamed—she was on sure ground there!

And she did help Ivy.

She could not cure or reassure; but she did brace the girl, even assuage her a little. Ivy went home less tortured than when she had come to her cousin.

Five months of tortured anxiety came and went, all the harder to bear because she would not share her anxiety with her husband. She set her teeth hard to spare him, as long as he could be spared, what he might have to endure soon enough. The months were made all the harder, too, by Gaylor's radiant bubbling masculine delight, his deep burning gratitude—when he knew—when he had to know.

He had been fond of her from the first—very, very fond of her, persistently good to her. Now he gave her worship, the clumsy, somewhat embarrassed worship that wells at such times in his type of Englishman—grateful, triumphant and alarmed. Would he hate her—in October?

There were days when again Nature had its way—days

when inherent mother-love, joy, pride, anticipation, swept all else aside—and Ivy was glad; glad—just glad! For despite all her twists of temperament, all her soul rebellion, Ivy Gaylor was womanly, sweet even when most “jangled out of tune”; and, too, her Chinese blood told. It always tells.

But those days were few. The grieving bitterness that followed, and that swamped her, was living, burning agony; dread of hate, dread of shame.

Sên King-lo and Ivy Gilbert had feasted on sour, forbidden grapes a quarter of a century ago. To-day their daughter's teeth were set on edge—on edge they gnawed and tore her very soul at that apex-time of womanhood when unsullied ecstasy, peace, entire contentment are woman's right.

The pity of it that that right ever can be alienable!

But Ruby Sên was suffering too.

In the long run, always the debtor pays—pays most when another seems to make the payment and does make the more palpable payment. No vicarious human atonement ever avails or releases the primary human debtor. Never.

Mrs. Sên knew almost as soon as Ivy herself did, had suspected it sooner than Ivy had. And Mrs. Sên knew why Ivy avoided her—never told her—not even when October had come.

While he had lived, Sên King-lo always had paid for them both—his wife's debt and his own.

If he blundered once—always Sên King-lo was a man.

But Ruby Sên was paying now.

## CHAPTER XLIX

WHEN they lingered together for a few moments after their guests were gone—as it was their custom to do, and usually for longer than they did to-night—Mrs. Sên did

not mention either Mr. C'hi or his daughter to her son. She had no need to ask, "How did you like my new Chinese friends?" She knew; and she had no wish to hear Ruben say it.

And she sent him from her sooner than she wished, for she dreaded sitting alone here in front of the gentle fire—sitting alone and making the sharp stock-taking of life that she knew was hers to take before she slept. She sent him away because her shrewd mother-eyes saw that beneath his deep new happiness Ruben was strangely tired.

Ruben was tired. Small wonder that he was. Bravely as he had borne it, the grind of the long weeks since the news of C'hi Yamei's cruel death had shattered him at the threshold of the *kuei*, had worn him relentlessly. He had steeled himself to carry himself gaily, for his mother's sake. His devotion to her, his great pride in her and his unquenchable enjoyment of her companionship had made even that unselfishness and sacrifice not only a matter of course, but had made it easier than it could have been to a different son of a different mother. But his sorrow for Yamei and for his loss of her had gnawed him ceaselessly; and the living grief that one hides, secreting it with constant vigilance beneath smiling face and debonair manner, has a sharper tooth than ingratitude.

To-night's revulsion—the sudden flood of joy and hope—had whipped him soul and body. He had been a widowed lover, a Chinese always to be childless, when he had come into this drawing-room a few hours ago. He had come in to know himself, almost instantly, again perhaps bridegroom—husband—father. Great blows of intense joy are harder to take quietly than the blows of sudden grief. Reprieve calls for sterner, firmer self-control than does sentence. The descent from the scaffold is more difficult, more fumbling, than the ascent. Pride—the very relief of knowing that it all

will be over in a moment now—braces the criminal to the gallows. The sudden new lease of life devastates him mind and body—frays his human nerves more sharply than can the sight of the dangling rope.

Ruben had been, in mere good behavior and in respect of her, obliged to meet C'hi Yamei—come back to him from the dead—conventionally, to greet her almost casually—as soon as he could. It had not been easy. Dinner had been almost as much of an ordeal as a pleasure. He was not on sure ground with the C'his by any means. He dared not startle the girl or affront her father. He had had to guard sternly his eyes and voice—to watch his words. And he had had to avoid scrupulously making the Chinese girl in any way conspicuous, by glance or tone of his, at his mother's English dinner table—conspicuous to a roomful of quick-witted, observant English people. He had had to turn away from her now and then and make small talk with the woman on his left—speak social nothings in English while his mind was thinking riotously in Chinese.

In the drawing-rooms after dinner he had had to leave her a good deal of the evening, to mingle with his mother's other guests, to be their host. He had had to let her go with no more open emphasis of his regret at her going than he had showed the others.

None of it had been easy. Sên was very tired.

He accepted his mother's dismissal without reluctance—or pretense of it.

"No," Mrs. Sên told him, "I am not going up yet. Clark will begin to undress me, whether I want her to or not, the moment she sees me; I know Clark! Send her word to go to bed herself—or pop your head in my door as you pass it, and tell her. I feel like toasting my toes here alone for a bit—and I'm going to. I've some very serious things to think out before I go to bed. I have tangled to-morrow rather, and

I must make up my troubled mind which important overlapping engagements I'll keep and which I'll break. Just give me my engagement book, Rue—it's down there, behind those carnations. I was grouching over it when Jenkins announced the Palmers."

Ruben laughed and brought the little social volume to her, kissed her good-night, and left her unsuspectingly.

And if he had wondered a very little that she, who had told him so enthusiastically that two Chinese were coming here to-night, had spoken no word of them now, Ruben had been glad that she had not. Even to her he longed not to speak of C'hi Yamei to-night.

He was not surprised to find Kow Li waiting for him in his room.

Kow Li had his mask off! The old man's wrinkled yellow face was coruscated with delight and triumph. If Sên Ruben had any doubt how it was to end, Kow Li had none.

But he too saw that Ruben was tired. He had expected him to be.

Kow had known that the great Ta Jen C'hi Ng Yelü was to be Mrs. Sên's guest here to-night. It was that that had brought the old millionaire from the curio shop to stand in servant-attendance behind a so noble Chinese Ta Jen's chair, to see that inferior English "rice" was offered to a descendant of Mencius with decent ceremony. But Kow Li had not known that the Chinese maiden whose portrait had hung at the London Academy, and whom they—Lord Sên Ruben and he—had sought so ceaselessly and so unavailingly, was a C'hi lady. He too had believed *her* gone on-High; for Sên Ruben had told him when first back from Ho-nan, "Look for the perfect pearl-one no more, Kow Li. I have found her, and I have lost her. Kwan Yin-ko has gathered her into her own courtyard on-High."

Only that once had she been mentioned between them.



Kow Li had known Sên Ruben's grief; had grieved for it and had respected it.

Nor was C'hi Yamei mentioned between them to-night.

Old Kow, wise in the blunders of rumor, had understood it all accurately enough, if not its detail, the instant he had seen Sên Ruben and the maiden of the picture together in the dining-room.

The details of Ruben's mistake he might learn some day, or he might not; it was of complete indifference to Kow Li, for it was of no importance.

The flower-of-jade fact stood: Sên Ruben had found his heart's desire.

As though his master were again a little child, old Kow Li undressed and tended him. Kow Li tucked Ruben in lingeringly and left him.

It were difficult to say which was the happier—the young Sên sleepless but dreaming, or the old yellow gray-beard padding softly with careful quiet down the richly-carpeted stairs of the hushed house.

Probably Kow Li was. Ruben doubted and feared almost as much as he hoped and loved. Kow Li neither doubted nor feared; his cup was full; he was altogether jubilant.

Ruby Sên was not happy.

Sitting alone in the vast drawing-room, the red-bound engagement-book she had not opened, a patch of brilliant color on the lemon of her satin gown, for the first time since her early girlhood Mrs. Sên looked her years; her face a little drawn, her brooding eyes heavy—not with sleep—a restless toe tapping the steel fender, a nervous hand picking at her skirt—watching a dying fire she did not see.

It was morning when Mrs. Sên rose wearily, left the little red book unheeded where it fell, and dragged drearily up to her room.

## CHAPTER L

**I**N China courtship—such pre-nuptial courtship as there is—is long and slow; longest and slowest among the girdle-wearers.

Maturity sets the pace in China, and maturity takes a slow speed. And it is the fathers who canvass, accept or reject, bargain and rebargain, with infinite shrewdness and great deliberation the innumerable preliminaries of every marriage; the two fathers who at long last “make-arrange” all the hundred conditions of betrothal and the ten score details of the actual marriage function. And the indispensable *mei-jêns*, the professional or amateur matchmakers, paid not for piece work, but in proportion to the difficulty of their completed task and of the time it has taken them, eat up endless months and *yuan*. The longer the *mei-jên* can delay, without imperiling it, the betrothal ceremony—far more binding and inviolable than the marriage itself—and the longer the matchmaker, after the long delayed betrothal, again can delay the marriage day, the heavier can that “smiling-faced one” make his bill—often a truly terrible document—that is always paid.

It would have taken Sên Ruben a long lapse of time to have married C’hi Yamei in China.

But Ruben Sên realized almost at once that the less elaborate and less circuitous ways of Europe would be more acceptable to C’hi Ng Yelü from his daughter’s suitor, so thoroughly had C’hi accepted the philosophy, more convenient than patriotic, of doing in Rome as those of Rome do.

Ruben believed that C’hi would give the straight question a straight and immediate answer.

And Ruben Sên could have but little doubt that C’hi would answer him favorably.

No one else, interested enough to watch C'hi and Sên together, had any doubt at all.

And Ruben was sure that he might woo and wed C'hi Yamei quickly in London—if C'hi Ng Yelü permitted it at all. Sên believed too that C'hi would. There was nothing of vanity, no touch of over self-assurance, in the lover's conviction that this was so; for almost C'hi had indicated it. If this shocked Chinese-minded Sên somewhat, it also cleared his way very pleasantly.

That his own mixed blood was not going to prove a barrier in C'hi's judgment, nor an offense to the older man's taste, surprised Ruben less than it logically and normally should. For Ruben had so thought of himself always as purely Chinese that he was apt to overlook what other Chinese scarcely could. He *felt* Chinese—even in a dinner jacket in his London club—and because he felt Chinese he had come to consider that he was Chinese—impeccably Chinese.

But he did suspect that, other things being equal, C'hi would not altogether object to an English-domiciled husband for his daughter. The old nomad liked being in England and said so calmly.

Once when Sên had said how much he regretted that he could not live at home in China—probably not for many years—C'hi had very nearly rebuked him.

"Stay where you are and be thankful," Ng Yelü said sturdily in his ready English. "This is the more comfortable country of the two now. There is no telling what those rascals are going to turn old China into before long. China still awaits and needs her strong man. Our old hope that Feng Yu-hsieng might prove he, is shattered. It was Feng who drove our Son of Heaven out from the Sacred Forbidden City and, doing it, sank to the gutter-level of the world's regicides. There is no daybreak in China yet, Sên. We who love her most firmly can only wait and watch. I choose to

do it here in England for this troubled present. Your duty is with your mother, unquestionably. If I were younger, I might feel called upon to stay away from Shan-si less than I do. But I am neither politician nor war-lord—not even much stuff for bannerman. And I am glad to have my girl in England's safety. It might have been she that was martyred at An Mu-ti. That experience turned my stomach. My gorge rises, and my blood runs icy whenever I think of it. She is all I have got. I loved her mother. I miss my wife every day of my life, Sên. The girl is very like her mother. I have no wish to see her—as I saw her poor little cousin; no wish to have her killed—or worse—in some Peking anti-legation broil or mob riot. It will please me best if Yamei stays in England. I could come and go then—oh, I have not turned my back on my own country—I could come and go as I chose—live part of my time not too far from the one thing I care for, warm me at her husband's fireside sometimes.”

That was plain speech for a Chinese father.

Sên did not exaggerate the significance. He thought it indicative, but not a direct personal opening offered to himself; still less a point-blank invitation.

Sên was right there.

C'hi liked Ruben and respected his intelligence enough to like to talk to him freely and with some intimacy. C'hi Ng Yelü was not husband-hunting for his daughter. He no more desired Sên to marry Yamei than he was opposed to it. He had no doubt that his lovely, charming and lovable girl would marry well and suitably. He expected her to marry a Chinese and, of course, a gentleman. An English duke come a-wooing of her would have had short shrift from C'hi Ng Yelü. But C'hi was sore afraid for China's immediate future, though not for her ultimate future which he believed securely founded in the bedrock of Chinese character. Even if China were conquered—C'hi did not anticipate it—she

would absorb and in absorbing reconquer, as she always had. But fearing his country's near future, he hoped his only living child might marry one of the many traveled Chinese of her own caste who more and more were making long sojourns, if not permanent residence, in the happier West. He liked and esteemed Sên Ruben immensely, and he trusted him. But he did regard Sên's white blood as some sort of a bar-sinister, very slight, but real and indelible. He would have preferred a son-in-law impeccably Chinese. To the son of an English father and a Chinese wife he would not have given Yamei. But a mother's ancestry mattered so much less! Mrs. Sên had become Chinese at her marriage. And Ruben had so much that more than balanced the disadvantage of mixed parentage.

C'hi Ng Yelü was content to leave it with the gods, which was merely his easy way of putting it, for C'hi had little faith in any gods. His cosmopolitanism had purged all the theologies from him. Millions of educated Chinese who never have left their native province, never have seen a treaty port, or wished to, are adamant agnostics.

All of which Sên understood rather accurately. He believed that C'hi would not repulse his suit; but he felt sure that C'hi would not have spoken so frankly had he actively wished to bring about that particular betrothal.

Would C'hi Yamei be content to have it so? That was what he longed to know, and feared to learn.

She did not dislike him or she would have spared fewer hours to him, granted him less of her friendliness, in her own home and here in London society.

The *camaraderie* she gave him frankly and gaily seemed to warn him that Yamei did not care—perhaps never would.

But, of late—for it was September now—she seemed to have grown shyer with him. That hinted that she had read



his purpose, and that it did not displease her, not even while it startled her girlish serenity.

Sên had no doubt in whose hands his fate lay. He believed that spiritually and socially emancipated C'hi Ng Yelü would not try to force or influence C'hi Yamei's inclination.

Ruben was not sure—but he hoped.

Once or twice when he had suddenly spoken to her in Chinese C'hi Yamei had flushed exquisitely; as the weeks passed his hope grew.

The flood-tide of his love was high.

## CHAPTER LI

**B**UT neither to C'hi nor to Yamei herself did Sên speak of his great desire. For his mother's sake he would not, until her grieved anxiety over Ivy had passed.

They had not spoken of it, but Ruben knew that his mother was suffering; almost knew how much she was suffering, so close and fine was the chord between them.

The Gaylors had been in Dorset since early June. Ivy had wished it. And what Ivy wished Gaylor wished as heartily now. Her motherhood had given them a second and a better honeymoon. And in their closeness, and the tenderer ardor of his new loving of her, Ivy's bitterness had lost something of its edge. But she had no wish for her mother, wrote but scantily, and never had referred to her approaching confinement to her mother. Mrs. Sên's cut was deep and sore, but she bore it in silence.

Tom knew, and rejoiced. The professional officials of the nearing event—nurses and physician—had been engaged, but beyond that Lady Snow was Ivy Gaylor's only confidante. Ruby Sên was shut out from all part or place in the crown-

hour of her daughter's life, held at arm's length from the coming of her first grandchild. It was aging her.

Ruben kept very close to his mother and heaped his love about her, or she must have "carried on" less bravely.

How would Sên King-lo have dealt with it—with Ivy, whom he had so loved—now? Ruby Sên wondered. She longed for him.

Charles Snow wondered too and was glad that King-lo had gone on.

Lady Snow, reticent as she always was when she believed it wisest or kindest, had said nothing to Sir Charles. But he had gathered a handful of tiny straws and had understood.

Ruben too had divined it.

Ruben understood and saw what Ivy was doing to their mother, and he blamed his sister harshly. Sir Charles, too, understood, but he did not blame Ivy. He had learned to blame no one for what they could not resist; it was many years since he had.

When—the day before she went to Dorset, as she had promised Ivy she would, early in October—Emma spoke of it to him directly, and for the first time, Snow made no comment except a slow sigh. His wife put her hand on his shoulder as she stood beside his chair, left her hand so a lingering moment, and said no more.

For several weeks Sên saw a little less of the C'his than formerly. He would not leave his mother more than she made him.

Mrs. Sên had neither dropped nor slighted Miss C'hi. That was an impossibility both for good manners and personal fairness. Miss C'hi had met her as accidentally as she had met Miss C'hi. The cordial advances of their first acquaintance had been made by her, not by Miss C'hi. The girl had never in the least pushed the acquaintance—almost had met

it with reserve. She had returned Mrs. Sên's calls—always formally. The C'his had returned Mrs. Sên's invitations. Nothing more than that.

They had dined with the C'his twice in the Westminster house that C'hi Ng Yelü had kept in his tenancy for many years. Each time there had been many other guests and Mr. Sên had not taken the young hostess in to dinner, or been seated near her.

Miss C'hi had no chaperon but her father in Europe. "Shades of China!" Snow had said to C'hi with a laugh; and C'hi, enfranchised and citizen of the World now, had chuckled his assent that probably all the gods of China—and certainly Etiquette-god—were athirst for his disobedient blood.

Towards Mrs. Sên, as indeed to every one, the Chinese girl had held herself perfectly: courteous, pleasant, a little cold. Ruby Sên was too well-bred, and she was too essentially a nice woman, to cold-shoulder now in any way the girl she had courted at their first meetings.

Mrs. Sên could only wait.

She knew what Ruben wished and that he intended to win it if he could; knew it as certainly as if he had told her.

Each day she expected that Ruben would bring her his great news and she steeled herself to meet it, less disturbed at its prospect, less mother-jealous of her boy's new love than she would have been, if she were not so absorbed in her grieving at Ivy's estrangement from her, or been less torn and jangled by what she feared the child's birth might do to Ivy—what Ivy's revulsion might be when Ivy saw her baby's face.

But Ruben Sên did not intend to bring any added "pull" of joy or sorrow to his mother until she was less troubled.

He knew that she must come to love Yamei very dearly, if he gave that daughter to her. He thought that he had kept

his radiant secret well—even from his mother—the secret that he had broadcast to every social receiver in Mayfair, Kensington, Hampstead and half the Counties.

In mid-October Gaylor wired to Mrs. Sên, "My daughter is magnificent and she has a fine soprano. Both well."

Ruby Sên hid her face in her shaking hands and sobbing pitifully prayed as she had not prayed before.

She was alone—with it.

Ruben had gone on an errand for her half an hour ago.

## CHAPTER LII

**A** GAIN it was a Chinese baby.  
Ivy gave a cry and turned her face into the pillow.

"I never shall forget that cry, Charlie. It was the bleat of some little stricken wild thing—the whimper of a baby lamb caught in a cruel, jagged trap."

"Very Chinese?"

"It was Ivy over again, as I first saw her."

Sir Charles Snow sighed dully.

"How did Gaylor take it?"

"Oh—he played the man. I slipped down and warned him. And I told him what Ivy felt about it—told him straight out all the story of her own rebellion and misery. And he—yes, he was rather splendid. I don't think he quite made head or tail of what it was all about. But I pounded it in—and he played the man. He was perfect with Ivy. You can ask the nurse."

Sir Charles Snow smiled grimly.

"Do you know, Charlie, I don't believe he'd have minded either—not on his own account, or Baby's either. And when you come to think about it, why should he? He has no doubt that Ivy is the most beautiful woman in England. Why

should he mind having a very lovely daughter that is—dark—and all the rest of it, any more than a wife like that?”

“Hope he don’t,” Snow muttered uncomfortably.

“But then you see, Baby isn’t pretty yet—that’s the worst of it. Ivy was a hideous baby, you remember.”

“I remember you thought so.”

“Luckily it is a girl—and that’s the only luck about it that I can see.”

“It will win its way with her—sure to,” the husband said, but there was less surety in his voice than in his words. “Ivy isn’t heartless. She will come to love her baby, won’t she, Emma?”

“Never! I don’t think she can. And perhaps the poor little thing will grow up to blame Ivy just as Ivy always has blamed *her* mother—to dislike her, even. Ivy has been cruel and unjust to Ruby.”

“Cruel, but not unjust, I think,” Charles Snow said sorrowfully. “Justice can be very cruel—often is.”

“But why should Ivy blame Ruby for having done years ago what she herself has done now? How dare she!”

“Because Ruby began it; and probably Ivy is blaming herself now, dear, quite as much as she blames Ruby, or ever has.”

“Well, then, that ought to cancel it!” Lady Snow spoke sharply.

“I don’t think so, Emma. And to my mind—and I suspect I’m right—Ruby’s fault was far graver than poor little Ivy’s. In the first place Ruby’s was the initial fault, out of which Ivy’s came about—was almost sure to. Ruby piled up a debt that her children and theirs were almost sure to have to pay in lifelong bitterness. Another thing: Ruby did not have to make a mixed marriage. Ivy had to—or not marry; for she had no race of her own. Ever thought of that, Em? She is not English; she is not Chinese. Mixed race is none.



We have no right—can't have under any possible circumstance—to write for them our children's signatures beneath our I. O. U.s. It is a damnable form of forgery. The law does not penalize us for it, but life always does. I see Ruby's misdeed considerably blacker than I see Ivy's—in several ways. The quadroon is not quite so sticky a subject as the half-caste is; and has an appreciable chance of having a less sticky life—and less thorny. Into whichever of the two races Ivy married, her children would come into the world with one blood predominant—three-fourths English or three-fourths Chinese. If Ivy thought about it at all—wiser and older people than Ivy do most of their thinking afterwards—probably she banked on that English three-fourths; believed, or made herself think that she did, that when the babies came along they'd be English babies right enough. Now, poor girl, she knows—and Tom will, if he doesn't grasp it yet. King-lo and Ruby took a law of nature into their own small hands. In doing it they took a bad risk for themselves; the debt fell due, and King-lo paid it. But they took a terribly greater risk for their descendants—condemned their own children to all the grave inconvenience, to put it no stronger than that, of mixed marriages, or of loneliness and sterility."

"How much of this did you say to Ivy?"

"None of it," Snow replied as he bent from his chair and laid a fresh log on the fire, "because I knew it was no use. In a way I broke faith with King-lo in not thrashing it all out with Ivy. But I knew that it would do no good at all and felt that I was keeping the better faith with him by not distressing her to no avail. But I said much of it to Gaylor; and a lot of good it did!"

Presently Snow went on with the troubled theme.

"Well, it's Ruben's turn now, and it is up to me to say to him what I did not say to Ivy. I shall put it all quite specifically to Ruben and give him his father's message in so

many words. It amounted to a direct message, what King-lo said to me a few days before he died."

"Will it do any good—with Ruben?" the wife asked gently.

"God knows! Yes; I think it may. Ruben will listen to me—as far as letting me say out my say and King-lo's. And I'll not put it off. I'll have my talk with Ruben before it is too late. I believe I could have prevented their marriage—King-lo's and Ruby's—if I had tackled it in time, not been pig-headed and blind when you warned me what was coming years ago in Washington. I'll not repeat my mistake of more than twenty-five years ago. I shall speak to Ruben at once, before he has fallen in love with any one—or thinks he has, which is quite as dangerous."

"Quite," Lady Snow agreed with a laugh.

Tea came in. Emma Snow was glad of that. Charlie liked his cup of tea, and he would sit down to drink it. She was so sorry for him, walking up and down in patent discomfort. Poor Charlie, who did not know that Ruben *had* fallen in love—very much in love too! Should she tell him? No—he was fretted enough for one day. Probably she'd better warn him a little later—or perhaps not, but let him go to his talk with Ruben with a free mind.

Lady Snow shook her head a little anxiously at the sugar basin, and frowned too at the unoffending cream jug as she bent over them, and filled her man's cup.

## CHAPTER LIII

THE Gaylors had come back to London and Ivy had left her child in their little place in the country.

Easter was late this year. The Park was gay with crocuses and snowdrops, and Kensington Gardens were gayer with snowdrops, crocuses and sturdy English babies. The Houses

were sitting; society was in full swing and exuberant fettle; Mrs. Gaylor scintillating like some joyous, brilliant star in the social orbit. And her husband went with her everywhere. A great many women envied Ivy Gaylor, and not a few owned it.

Only Emma Snow knew the cold, poisoned under-current of Ivy Gaylor's real life—though Mrs. Sên suspected what she did not dare to probe.

Ivy had met her mother, as it seemed, quite naturally, and without either inviting or evading the few questions that had seemed to Mrs. Sên unavoidable—less awkward, though awkward enough, to ask than to omit to ask.

Oh—yes—the baby was quite well. Yes, thanks, the nurse was excellent, the under-nurse was right enough. Vaccinated—yes, Ivy thought so. No—they hadn't named her yet, but some one would have to soon; there'd be a scandal in the county and a riot in the Gaylor family if it wasn't christened soon.

Ivy made no apology for having ignored her mother during the months when a young mother usually clings to her own mother very closely. But she thanked Ruby quite prettily for the silver Mrs. Sên had sent. No—she didn't know when they'd be going back to Dorset—she and Tom. She was enjoying herself hugely in town—more than she ever had before. No doubt Tom would rather be in the country, sneaking after rabbits and gloating over his cabbages and curly kale; but Tom was a good boy and did as he was told. She had no idea when they'd be back in Dorset—but if Mrs. Sên cared to run down any time, Griggs and Mrs. Clegg would make her very comfortable.

Ruby Sên took it quietly; that she did as part of her penance.

She knew that she had lost her daughter and she hid her hurt. Nor did she blame Ivy for it. Life had taught Ruby

Sên human justice, and she knew that Sên King-lo might have lost his wife if he had not been so wonderful to her that time they'd been in Ho-nan.

Mrs. Sên motored alone to Dorset and gathered Ivy's unwelcomed baby into her own arms and heart, and held it very tenderly.

Mrs. Sên stayed with her tiny grandchild several weeks until she felt that her being there so long, while Ivy was in London, might be causing caustic comment, and she owed it to Ivy to stay no longer.

One thing comforted Ruby Sên. She did not believe that Ivy did not love her little baby. It was not so that Mrs. Sên read her child's conduct. She believed that if there had been no mother-love in Ivy's heart, Ivy would not so stress and flaunt callous indifference. She knew that Ivy was suffering intensely; and she believed that it was the suffering of love—suffering more for child than for self. And Ruby Sên had the courage to hope that the little baby, in its own way and God's time, would heal Ivy's torn heart, as Sên King-lo's manliness had healed her of her cruel folly years ago when she had caviled at his country and revolted from his kindred in Ho-nan, who had welcomed her, and whom he had loved. It was not for Sên King-lo's wife to censure their daughter for a fault that had been her own; and King-lo's widow—who was still his wife—was loyal to his manliness, not in payment, not chiefly in gratitude, but in growth, and in the womanliness that had been his marriage gift to her; a marriage gift increased and enriched in all their days together.

Her estimate of Ivy was less shrewd than Emma Snow's—but she was Ivy's mother.

Mrs. Sên was sorrowful as her car swept back to London, and she was anxious; but she did not despond.

She counted on Ruben, and, though she knew that it would

gall her a little just at first, she was looking forward to the time when he would give her a daughter who would love her—when his unfortunate *penchant* for Miss C’hi had passed.

It was after tea-time when Mrs. Sên reached home. She was a little tired and she wanted tea rather badly.

Ruben was not there to meet her. That chilled her a little, and quite unreasonably for she had not warned him or the servants of her coming, partly because she had not determined until actually on her way whether she would go to Ashacres for a few hours, or directly to London, partly because she had wished to leave him quite unfettered. She thought that Ruben had sacrificed his time to her too much of late. But she longed for him as she went into the house, and because she did not find him, the familiar rooms looked almost unhomelike. In spite of her usual sturdy common sense, his absence suddenly seemed an ill omen.

Mr. Sên had been out all day, Jenkins said; had come in to change soon after lunch and had gone again in less than half an hour. No, his master had left no message, and had not said that he would be dining at home.

There was no reason why Ruben should have left any message, since he had not been expecting her, but it hurt her that he had not.

The woman’s nerves were jangled. Ivy, the coming of the baby, and its problem had jangled them, old complications belching up after long years of comparative immunity, without King-lo to disentangle or destroy them, without Ruben to brace her, make her forget for an hour, without Ruben to pour her tea for her. Ruben always poured when they were alone.

The silver teapot dragged heavy in her hand, the cup and saucer looked solitary; she felt solitary—and neglected.

Probably Ruben would be dining out too! He’d come home



to change though and would offer to break his dinner engagement. But she'd not allow him to do that.

Tea alone—dinner alone, if she dined. Oh, well—it was her own fault.

Perhaps Emma or Charlie would look in presently, if only to learn if she were back. She hoped neither of them did.

Perhaps they'd phone.

It didn't matter either way.

## CHAPTER LIV

C'HI YAMEI wore her Chinese robes to-day. Out of her own sleeping room she never did that in London—rarely even there, so entirely had her father imbued her with his own "when in Rome." But to-day was an anniversary and she had tired her hair as she wore it on gala days at home in Shan-si, and had taken from the copper studded red leather box, where she kept her most intimate treasures, a suit of her pretty Chinese garments—trousers, long overhanging tunic, little padded shoes—and had slipped into them just because she wished to; had put them on for a few moments and then had felt that she could not take them off—that she could not wear English clothes to-day. So the soft pongee biscuit-colored tunic with its edge of intricate embroidery, and its high spruce collar, and the shimmering blue and green crêpe trousers still appareled her when she went down to share her father's very English breakfast.

She had half expected C'hi Ng Yelü to chide her gently, probably with a laugh—perhaps even to bid her change.

But C'hi did not. She reminded him too greatly of another Chinese girl, who before Yamei's birth had come to him across China to be the one perfect flower of all his fra-

grant courtyard, reminded him too poignantly of his girl-wife who had trembled so exquisitely when his arms had folded about her, lifted her out from her bride-chair, and borne her across his threshold. All her bride-belongings were carried behind her by her father's coolies and among them was that same box of crimson leather that stood now at the foot of Yamei's bed here in England as it had stood for years at the foot of her mother's sleep-couch, smelling then as now, when you opened it, of carnations and heliotrope and violets.

The footman threw the butler a glance and the impeccable butler did not rebuke him by so much as the glower of an eyelash. C'hi Ng Yelü made no comment on tunic, stick-pins or just-showing trousers; and Miss C'hi stayed as she was all day, even to the tiny gold ear-rings that almost all unemancipated Chinese women wear, the tight-packed blossoms above her ears and the delicate straight-cut fringe of hair on her forehead that proclaimed her an unmarried girl—the very short downy fringe that would disappear at marriage, unless it grew deeper and heavier because her nuptial portion was that of a “number-two.” But no C'hi girl had been given so in marriage for three thousand years; to be born a C'hi girl was to be born the first wife of some man who was sash-wearer and lord-one.

Two years ago to-day the fighting fish of Sên Yolu had beaten the fighting fish of Sên Pling in the amber pool among the bamboos and soap-trees. Did Sên Ruben remember?

That was what C'hi Yamei kept asking herself all day long. She had asked it as she woke, asked it as she dug her spoon into her grapefruit, wishing the grapefruit a pomolo; asked it as she carried her pretty loose-hanging draperies and her trembling stick-pins to the pleasant upper room which was peculiarly C'hi Yelü's and hers, the sitting room to which English visitors rarely were admitted—not even Miss C'hi's English girl friends. For C'hi Yamei had

made many girl friends in London, liked several of them very much indeed and felt real affection for one or two.

The long room had windows at each end that looked out on to the quiet leafy square that fronted the house and down on the garden where a sun-dial on the velvet grass told the hour as often as the English sun would let it. There were roses beyond the dial, and wistaria and clematis disputed the red brick garden walls with jasmine and juniper. Yamei's doggies were chasing and tumbling on the lawn, Chinese dogs that were Chinese born and bred.

C'hi Yamei stood a long time at the window watching them and laughing at them; asking herself if, by any chance, Sên Ruben would remember the anniversary of a Ho-nan fish fight. Why should he? Well—just possibly because he had so disapproved of it, as she had.

Out of the other windows Yamei would not look. Why should she watch the street below their front door? She was not interested in its traffic. She was expecting no one. Who would call at this hour? Probably she'd not trouble to see any one that did call later. She would not waste this Chinese dress of hers on a supercilious crowd of chattering visitors down in the drawing-room, who would not appreciate its lovely symbolic embroideries, or dream how many Chinese needles had plied in its patient making. And she had a fancy to stay all day gowned as she was now. Perhaps Sên No Fee was thinking of her now—naughty No Fee who had watched the horrid fish fight, and watching had sickened in the soap-tree's hollow. No Fee would not know that this was the anniversary of the fish fight. No's little feather mind was not notched by dates—or much else—unless her approaching marriage really had notched it deep. But that madly gay one, for all she was as prankish as any pair of sleeve-dogs, had a warm and constant heart. No Fee had not forgotten her, C'hi Yamei was sure. It was a pity-thing that

Sên No Fee could not write or read. Many of the Sên ladies could do both, but No Fee had scorned to learn and Sên Kai Lun had so spoiled her! No Fee would have written to her sometimes, for all she was a lazy minx-one, and she in turn would have written back to No and told her rare things of London. No Fee would have been glad to hear that they had met Sên Ruben, and his mother, seen the house they lived in, spoken with them. There would have been no need to tell No Fee how often she'd made speech with Sên Ruben. But something of him No would like to hear for No Fee had had much affection for her cousin-one Sên Ruben.

One would have been wise to write with caution to Sên No Fee; No had a babbling tongue. And much that one did and permitted here in London would not be understood in Ho-nan; would seem more and other than it was.

The long room was sparsely furnished; the sparse furniture was rich.

C'hi Ng Yelü always called it, when speaking to his daughter, *Shu Chai*—which Englished is "Reverence Books room"; to the servants—the C'his had only English servants in London—he always spoke of it as the library. Library was an absurd misnomer; the long room housed scarce more than a score of books. C'hi Ng Yelü was charming, intelligent, a great reader of one or two daily papers, but he was neither scholar nor bookworm.

But the Chinese nomad who had lived in England so much, and was, unlike most of his countrymen, so instinctively a citizen of the world that he had come to find life more comfortable and much more amusing in London than in China, still was Chinese at heart. His memories of China were good; his memories of Shan-si were dear and tender. He called this almost bookless room of his London house *Shu Chai* in memory of a room in hill-cupped, river-washed Shan-si, in which C'hi Ng Yelü had learned to read and to

brush his characters, his infant hand so small that it did not grasp easily or too surely the mahogany stem of his writing brush; the room in which C'his more scholarly than he had stored and treasured their priceless books and scrolls for many leisured centuries.

This room of theirs, that few others ever entered, had many more traces of Yamei his daughter than it had of C'hi Ng Yelü. The girl's work-basket stood on the top of the Brinsmead, high up there to keep it out of the reach of destructive canine paws and jaws. Yamei's embroidery frame stood in a corner. Her lute, which she sometimes played, was on its low table, the girl's low stool beside it. The open grand piano which she very rarely touched was hers too, and more distinctively feminine belongings than the little ribbon-decked work-basket littered the piano's long rosewood top.

Yamei sat down beside her embroidery frame and drew a needle out of an apple-blossom, and began "painting" with it rather listlessly. Miss C'hi was more intent on a fish fight in Ho-nan than she was on needlework.

Had Sên Ruben by any odd chance remembered?

Of course not!

But perhaps he had, after all; for the box a servant brought to her as she sat tinting a blossom's petal was full of pale yellow roses—and she had plucked a yellow rose and carried it in her hand to the house with her when they had gone together from the bamboo walk, across the garden to the *kuei* door—she and Sên Ruben—that first day of all.

And the girl fell a-dreaming, idle at her work frame, a dimpled face bent wistful-eyed over an open florist's box of pale yellow roses. She would not have told No Fee a word of those yellow roses if she had been writing. Often Mr. Sên had sent flowers to Miss C'hi before this—very often. There was nothing in it, of course. Every man did it to every girl in London. But No Fee could not have understood



it at all. Men did not do it in Ho-nan. Probably it happened often enough in Hong Kong and those places now—all sorts of barriers were down in the treaty ports—but it did not happen in Sênland, nor in C'hiland either. C'hi Yamei laughed softly, cuddling a big box of roses on her knee, drawing a yellow rose across her face—just because the satin petals were fragrant and pleasant to feel. She laughed softly, trying to think what the nuns at An Mu-ti would say if they heard of “such goings on.”

But roses are thirsty things and yellow roses must not be neglected—not by a Chinese girl who should treat all yellow roses with great reverence, because in the home of the wild white rose, the gardeners who train them over trellises of lacquer ko'tow to the yellow roses that grow in the imperial gardens.

C'hi Yamei swept all her belongings off the piano, and put her roses there in a great crystal bowl of cool water. She did it herself. And one rose she kept back from its fragrant fellows; C'hi Yamei drew its long stem through a buttonhole of her tunic. It was such a rose that she had drawn through such a tunic's buttonhole as she passed into the *kuei* two years ago in Ho-nan.

## CHAPTER LV

THE heart of a man stood still; Sên's face flooded with color.

The girl was bending over his roses. She did not know he was there and her face was eloquent; C'hi Yamei whom he saw lovelier because she wore her Chinese garments.

And Sên Ruben knew that the time had come for him to speak—not to her, though he believed even that C'hi Ng Yelü, the adopter of Western ways, might condone, but to

C'hi Ng Yelü himself, sending Kow Li as preliminary suitor and go-between.

He would approach the Chinese maiden as a Chinese should. No rougher, Western wooing was possible between his love and hers. It was hard to keep back the words that surged from his heart to his lips, but he would do even that to show his reverence for C'hi Yamei, the jade of his soul. Kow should approach C'hi Ng Yelü, and should come as the matchmaker sent by Sên Ruby. That meant more delay, for his mother might stay even a week longer with the new-come grandchild in the nurseries that Ivy its mother had forsaken.

A week of seven eternities! But no less than the most would he offer to C'hi Yamei the yellow jasmine of the world.

Sên Ruben saw the rose on her breast. It gave him a message. His nails found the flesh of his palms as he clenched his hungry hands, and his breath tangled in his throat.

He wanted her so!

The girl bent her head still lower over his roses. The smile that curved her lips grew sweeter, more tender, and Ruben knew that if that dear face touched those yellow roses he should stride across the long room and snatch his happiness to him—before it was given.

Lest that temptation came—not to be mastered by human man who loved as he did—Sên Ruben spoke quickly. He dared not stand watching longer her lips almost caressing the roses he had sent her; he could not turn and go.

"Good afternoon, Miss C'hi." He steadied his voice almost to coldness, and he prayed that he had steadied his eyes. "Good afternoon. Please don't turn me out; Mr. C'hi sent me up here to wait for him. He promised that you would put up with me until he came back. He was leaving the house as I came up the steps, but he will be home again in

an hour. I have strict orders to wait for him—here with you.”

He rarely spoke to C’hi Yamei in English when they were alone but he had not dared speak in Chinese now.

The girl started at the sound of his voice—Ruben saw that; but what of it? She probably would have started if Billings, the aldermanic butler, had accosted her so unexpectedly. Had he been less busy with gripping himself, he also might have seen that C’hi Yamei had paled a little at the sound of his voice.

“May I come in?”

Miss C’hi smiled, turned away from the flower-decked Brinsmead, and went to a seat near the far windows—the window that looked down on the garden.

“I did not know that Father was going out,” she began. “Oh—yes, though, I did—I forgot—he said something about it at lunch. Please sit down.”

“Thanks. I wonder if Pling and Yolu are inciting poor little Burmese fish to murder and suicide to-day.” He glanced at his wrist. “It is just on the Hour of the Tiger at home. I hope my cousins are taking their pleasure less ruthlessly than they did two years ago to-day.”

“I hope so,” Miss C’hi agreed.

So—he did remember.

She turned towards the window, for she felt that her face was flushing.

“I hope that my father had an umbrella,” the girl said lamely. “See, it is raining.”

Sên rose and went to the window. “So it is. I did not notice that it threatened to as I came.”

That was quite true. Ruben Sên had paid no attention at all to the weather as he walked from Kensington to Westminster. And he had not noticed whether Mr. C’hi had gone out armed with an umbrella or coatless and hatless.

A fine thick drizzle was falling. Ruben liked it; it seemed like a veil shutting them in here gently—almost a symbol.

"Now you can't turn me out!" he laughed softly as he turned and faced Miss C'hi. "It was not raining when I came in and I have no umbrella."

"How careless!" the girl mocked him. "No sensible person ever goes out in England without an umbrella; it is riding a tiger. But I can lend you an umbrella, Mr. Sên."

"Will you? One of your own?" His voice said, "I'll not return it to you ever; I'll keep it as long as I live, Yamei."

But he sat down again, as he spoke, facing her. Apparently he was not braving the outside drizzle at once.

Miss C'hi played with her girdle.

For a time neither spoke.

The man had no wish to speak—no wish to break their companionable, intimate silence. It was intimate.

The girl could think of nothing to say.

The gathering rain tinkled the window panes, tapped on the glass like fairy fingers.

"Thank you," Ruben said at last in a queer low voice.

Miss C'hi looked a puzzled interrogation.

He moved a hand in salutation towards her embroidery-bordered sleeve. "You are all Chinese to-day, C'hi Yamei, a Chinese flower wrapped in Chinese silk," Sên Ruben murmured in Chinese, "all of a Chinese maiden's lovely Chinese strewments"—his eyes swept from the little padded shoes to the pretty dangling stick-pins—"all as it should be, Lady C'hi Yamei, all but the face-paint."

"I couldn't find my face-paint box," the girl explained; she would have spoken more truly if she had said that she had no face-paint box here in England. But she was making words to shut off a silence she feared, catching up idle words carelessly to keep their talking safe.

She knew now what was coming, and she too wished her

lover whom she loved to say it to C'hi Ng Yelü. She wished it so, not because she cared a Japanese *yen*—or one small cowrie shell—for the conventions of East or of West, but because it would be easier to hear it first from the father voice that had spoken all the intimate, tender words she ever had heard. Moreover, though she herself cared not a jot now for East or West, she was keenly sure that Sên Ruben cared everything for China. C'hi Yamei was not minded that he should realize, as she herself did, how little she now preferred Chinese ways and customs—if she preferred them at all—to those of England; for she knew that he would find it a flaw.

Moreover C'hi Yamei came of a race of women who for thousands of years had only been wooed so before their wedding-day—wooed by the go-between's overtures and a father's acceptance of them. Probably this influenced her rather deeply, and made her share far more than she suspected Sên's conviction that his wooing of her in any but the old accredited Chinese way would be a slighting of her.

The girl was deeply stirred and knew that she was. Almost she wished that Sên would go. She felt shy of him—they alone here in "Reverence Books" to which the servants would usher no chance caller, and she in her Chinese garments, harem clothes that seemed to demand harem seclusion for a Chinese maid who wore them. Décolleté at his mother's dinner-table, dancing a dozen times with his arm lightly about her, laughing and chatting with him at dozens of functions—a little less freely, though, than nice English girls would have done—Miss C'hi never had felt at all shy with Mr. Sên. But she grew oddly and naturally shy with Sên Ruben now, since they were Chinese and she in Chinese dress. Worst of all she feared that at but a word of more direct love-making she should cry. Her tears were near. To avoid what she half thought might break from him, she said



the first frivolous and very English thing she could think of, rising and going towards the other window as she spoke.

Ruben went with her of course.

The girl had jumped up quickly. Her stick-pins tinkled as she went, and a tiny pack of apricot-colored flowers fastened not securely enough over an apricot-colored ear loosened and shifted. Miss C'hi halted and lifted a tiny jeweled hand to push the truant bunch of buds back to where a girl's hair-flowers should be. She lifted both hands, in case the other little flower-bunch had slipped too, and accidentally her impatient tiny fingers pushed back the little straight fringe of down that lay like silken dust on her forehead.

"Now you are a wife, Yamei!"

It broke from Sên Ruben involuntarily as he devoured with leaping eyes the strip of naked brow they should not have seen.

C'hi Yamei's face had found its paint!

Her tunic rose and fell with the flesh that fluttered beneath it. In spite of herself the girl's eyes filled with tears.

But she laughed softly, a sound as silver and elfin as the tinkle-tinkle of the jeweled stick-pins in her hair—a soft outburst of mirth, that is a giggle, but should be described by a prettier word. But it cannot.

The lover saw the rush of color painting her face; he saw the dimples in the uplifted apricot-tinted arms from which the loose sleeves had fallen; he saw the dew in Yamei's black velvet eyes, saw her lashes tremble, and the ring-jewels tremble from the trembling of her fingers; he saw the girlish mouth quiver.

And Sên turned and fled.

He did not dare stay.

Sên knew that the time had indeed come for him to speak to C'hi Ng Yelü.

## CHAPTER LVI

IF he had not found his mother at home when he went in, Sên would have gone to her the next morning after learning by 'phone whether he'd find her at Ivy's in Dorset or at Ashacres.

It brooked no delay now and Ruben's heart wished none.

He would speak with his mother at once, and she would send for Kow Li, and send Kow her *mei jên* to C'hi Ng Yelü.

Sên's heart reeled with music—the old, old music of which love makes every great lover a *maestro*.

Mrs. Sên had come, a servant told Ruben.

To-morrow he would speak to her, but not to-night, Sên determined, when he saw her sitting alone at the tea-table. He saw instantly that she was tired and lonely. Then saw the welcome and joy that leapt in her face and eyes as she held out her hands.

To-day and to-night were his mother's, hers only.

He had no fear that she would seek to thwart or dissuade him. He hoped that she would welcome his news and the request he would make. But not to-night!

His cup had brimmed over to-day. He would fill and sweeten hers to-night.

Ruben Sên was a great lover as Sên King-lo his father had been. They were great lovers because their souls were great and because their loves were few.

Sên King-lo had loved two women: his mother, who had died while he was a babe, but whom all his life he had loved well—though he could not remember her—and the English girl who now was his widow Ruby Sên.

Sên Ruben loved three women and never was to love an-

other; he loved his mother, Ivy, his sister, and C'hi Yamei, the daughter of C'hi Ng Yelü.

Strain and age faded out of Mrs. Sên's face. Ivy would come to love the little baby; all would be well with Ivy again. That Ivy ever would come to forgive and wholly love her, Mrs. Sên scarcely hoped now—could not hope, after the bitter experience of the chasm between them that Ivy's expectant motherhood had made. But let that go! Ivy's own happiness was all the mother asked. In Ivy's she would find her own, and in Ruben. The mother of such a son need not keep sorrow long.

Sên rang for fresh tea and cut her cake; he waited on her, petted her, amused her.

The woman's face cleared; presently it flushed like a delicate sun-warmed rose. Her eyes were sparkling when Ruben left her at the door of her dressing-room, and she was laughing when she rang for her maid.

They dined alone. The meal was gay.

They sat alone together in her own sitting-room, and all their gay loving talk was of themselves.

It was the mother who exclaimed how scandal-late it was—"almost the Hour of the Ox, Sên Ruben! You think I can't tell the time in Chinese, do you? I can tell a lot of things in Chinese, Ruben!"

Ruben caught his mother in his arms and held her close and long before he kissed her good night; an English kiss he always had given her.

He lingered a little in her room after his mother had gone, touching things that were hers, standing a long time in front of his father's picture, regarding it gravely; and his heart spoke to the heart of Sên King-lo.

Ruben's love of his father—whom he could not remember—always had been living and intimate, as Sên King-lo's love

had been of the mother he could not remember. Such abiding love is not unusual—in China.

In his own room Ruben stood a long, long time looking across London toward Westminster.

The house was very still.

All London seemed hushed in sleep.

Did C'hi Yamei sleep?

How good the gods were!

How rich he was!

What perfect happiness!

His mother and Yamei—both his.

To-morrow—it *was* to-morrow—he would sit by his mother and tell her his story, sharing its sweetness and joy with her.

Sên Ruby whom his father had loved—and Sên C'hi Yamei his bride, whom he adored!

The gods were on-High; all was well in the world of Sên Ruben!

Sên Ruben's eyes were misty as he turned away from his open window.

It was not a Chinese room. It might have been any rich young Englishman's room, though few such were as simply furnished. But an ivory Kwan stood near his bed, a far more beautiful portraiture of the "Hearer-of-cries," than the pictured Kwan that hung beside his mother's bed as it had hung for years beside Sên King-lo's narrow bed.

And Ruben had a few Chinese trifles tucked away in a drawer.

He found a bundle of tapers—a red prayer too—and lit incense and prayer paper before his ivory Kwan Yin-ko.

Ruben slept well and late. And so did Mrs. Sên.

But C'hi Yamei was wakeful and restless. C'hi Yamei turned again and again on her pillows until a new day crimsoned over gray London. But Yamei was not unhappy.

## CHAPTER LVII

AFTER as glorious a sunrise as England often sees, the day again turned to rain; not the soft veil of misty drizzle of yesterday, but a hard thudding downpour that persisted and grew to a sullen vicious storm of leaden rain.

The Chinese love all weathers, seeing beauty, finding blessing in each. To them the long twisted icicles hanging off the eaves of a hut are as exquisite as the red flower-heavy passion vine clambering a lacquer trellis; the lowering clouds of black winter that blot the sky from earth as beautiful as the wild flowers that clot the sweet-scented meadow-grass of early summer. Ruben caught neither chill nor omen in the black tumbling storm that almost blanketed the breakfast-room windows.

Mrs. Sên never had been depressed by any weather; August heat never had wilted her, girl or woman; the worst London fog never had disgruntled Ruby Sên.

Ruben snapped on the electric lights with a laugh, and his mother poured their coffee with a smiling tranquil face.

And when they had breakfasted, and went across the hall arm-in-arm, the morning-room was bright with flowers under the silk-softened electric lights that shone, not too coldly or garishly, on pictures and cushions, bits of marble, ivories and bronze, cabinets and bric-a-brac. The outer rage and dark but made the luxurious little room a nest of comfort and friendliness; a place of plenty and taste that was fit confessional where the priest was love and the guiltless penitent about to show his heart to his mother.

Ruben Sên put his mother into her favorite chair, brought her another cushion which she did not need but liked to have because he had crossed the room to get it for her. Then he



drew a stool close and, holding the arm of her chair with his hand, told her his story.

He told it tenderly and proudly—tender to her his mother, tender of C’hi Yamei, his love. His eyes never left his mother’s face—glad blue eyes that were fearless and trusting. His low voice did not falter once.

The telling was not brief. Love lingered over the old, old story—the hours they had spent together in Ho-nan, he and C’hi Yamei, good times, and wise, serious times too, that they had shared in London; words she had spoken, things he had said, places they both had liked, people they had laughed at. He had not known for a long time if he could win so much as her liking, and then, presently, he had dared to hope. He had known at once how it was with him. He had known that before he had met Miss C’hi in Ho-nan.

The mother all but cried out when he told her of his falling in love at Burlington House with a picture, and had vowed himself to it—had sworn to search the world for the girl in that picture.

That fatal Academy! Ruby Sên could hear Ivy’s outbreak after *she* had seen that Academy portrait—an outbreak of swollen, poisoned misery a mother could not forget. She had heard it anew as she held Ivy’s unloved baby, her own widowed heart almost bursting with love of them both—daughter and grandchild.

She had not heard before that Rue had seen the portrait of “A Chinese Lady.” He had mentioned it to no one but Kow Li. And he had loved it! Betrothed himself to it!

That seemed as fantastic to the English-born woman as a revolting “dead marriage,” an absurd “vase marriage,” or any other of the nuptial abnormalities that she knew did take place now and then in China. But she knew that if Sên King-lo had fallen in love with a picture and had vowed himself to it, he would have held to the oath while he lived.

How like Lo their Ruben looked sometimes! He did now; and how like his father's, his voice!

Not even Sir Charles Snow, who had searched for it, perhaps hundreds of times, ever had seen a trace of King-lo's face in Saxon Ruben's or heard a note of King-lo's voice in the boy's; but now and then Ruby Sên did.

She saw Ruben, their son, very like her husband to-day. The beautiful molding of the mouths had a sameness; a sudden lift of deep-fringed blue eyes and of black, a lilt of voice that rang softly and caressed; and Rue used his hands—very English hands, unlike Sên King-lo's—in moments of quiet emotion just as Lo had. Ruby Sên often saw her husband in their son; and what she saw was there—more, perhaps, an inner something that, piercing through the flesh, marked it with lines and hints of contour so fine that only the eyes of the wife and mother who loved them both could see them.

Ruben went on with his joyous telling—a child in his eager outpouring to his mother, a man in his proclaiming of his love and craving and claiming of C'hi Yamei as mate and wife. Ruben went on turning a knife in the heart of his mother.

It was not yet she would have him marry. Ruben was so young!

It was not a Chinese wife she would have him choose, not a Chinese daughter she could learn or school herself to love—to share him with.

And he looked so English—more English than she herself—and had lived so naturally a normal English life, in English ways!

Months ago she had felt this coming, and had schooled herself to meet and accept it. But it had receded from her fear of late, partly because she had been so locked with Ivy's estrangement and with Ivy's anxiety. And the strain and grind of the last few months had weakened her and her fund

of resolution. Mrs. Sên heard Ruben to the end, all her being in revolt; and then she failed him.

"Oh, Ruben—*must* you?" she cried in open bitterness.

Ruben's face changed—as a confiding child's that the mother he loved and trusted had struck when it had lifted to her for a caress.

"Must you announce it just yet, dear?" the mother added quickly, and very tenderly. "Ivy is absolutely lost in misery just now. Baby will pull her out of it, I am sure. It is the dearest baby, Rue! It's a perfect duck! Ivy *cannot* resist it. But let us give Ivy a few weeks—let us, can't we—you and I and C'hi Yamei? Not thrust our happiness in front of her until she has found her own happiness again?"

The woman leaned back against her cushions a little pathetically.

She had made her *amende*. The mother had played up splendidly to her boy. And she knew that she should not fail him again. She would welcome C'hi Yamei cordially and hide what she felt about it always.

That was her penance for her willfulness of long ago. But it was a mother's selfishness too. She would not lose Ruben. The Chinese girl should not come between them—not altogether!

For Ruben's face—and her memory of the unalterable constancy of Sên King-lo, his father—had told her, even as she cried, "Ruben, must you?" that he *must*, that it was inevitable.

She knew that it was done and knew that it was not for her to smirch or sour his gladness with any sadness of hers.

She would deceive him to the end to hold him hers.

She did not believe that Ruben would marry without her consent. She had no doubt that he would hold to the most sacred sacrament of Chinese manhood: devotion and fealty of a Chinese son to his mother. The ball was at her feet!

She could banish C'hi Yamei from Ruben's life; but if she did, Ruben would pay the price. And not even to obey or gratify her would he love again or be coaxed to any other marriage.

Ruben should not pay her debt. She would pay it to the utmost that it could be paid—the last small coin of suffering and of renunciation.

He had chosen the Chinese of his two irreconcilable birth-rights. She would not forbid him.

"Perhaps I am wrong though, Rue. I believe I have lost my sense of proportion—I've fretted so over poor Ivy. Yes—it was just feeble-minded nonsense. Ivy has her own life now, a very full and happy one, if she'll let it be so—and she will presently, I'm sure. She is an enormously lucky girl with Tom—a husband made to order, I call him—and that perfect peach of a baby. Yes, dear, it is your turn now—your turn at the wheel of happiness; *our* turn—yours and Yamei's and mine. Give her my love to-day, Rue," she leaned to him and took his face in her hands, "and bring my daughter to her mother."

Ruben drew his mother's hands down and kissed them lingeringly.

"You will love her, Mother?"

"I do love her!"

Sên's face blazed his happiness.

"But, if you'd rather London didn't know yet—that is, if I can get C'hi Ng Yelü's consent, and hers, Mother—of course it shall be so. Why should London be informed any more than consulted! It's no business of London's, is it? And, Mother dear, I'd rather not even ask them yet—Mr. C'hi or Yamei—if you would rather I waited. But there is something I must tell you, before you decide. I was there yesterday—"

Mrs. Sên laughed.

"Really!" she mocked him lovingly.

Sên laughed back at her happily.

"We were alone, she and I, and I lost my head, or very nearly did—I don't exactly remember just what I said."

"I can imagine, Rue," the mother laughed. "And," she added gravely, "I know how you said it, and how a girl's heart beat; your father wooed me when I was a girl."

They were silent for a long moment.

"I did not do that, dear. At least, I hope not. But I think she understood me."

Mrs. Sên nodded softly. She remembered.

"And I do feel that I ought not to wait an hour longer than *you wish me to wait* before putting it clearly to C'hi Ng Yelü."

"Certainly not! Go to him to-day."

"Won't you send, Mother?"

"I, dear? I will do whatever you wish, Rue. I will go myself, or ask Mr. C'hi to come to me; just whatever you like best. But, dear, really it is your job, isn't it?"

"Not in China, Mother."

"Oh—of course. I forgot. We had no go-between, your father and I, Rue. It—it just happened."

"It very nearly just happened yesterday," Ruben owned.

"Tell me just what you would like me to do and say, Rue."

"Thank you, Mother." Sên's voice and face brimmed with his gratitude and it hurt the mother that they did.

She hid that though.

"Will you send for Kow Li or let me send him to you?"

Mrs. Sên understood. "And send him from me to C'hi Ng Yelü—my *mei jên*?"

"Yes, please."

"Not Cousin Charles?"

"No—please. The *mei jên* need not be a man of quality—almost never is, at home."



Home! The mother's heart winced again; again she hid it.

"Kow Li will do it perfectly. He is a Chinese and of our province, a servitor of our family for centuries. Kows have been henchmen of the Sêns for thousands of years, you know. Why, Kow is our ideal *mei jên*, born for the part. And," Sên chuckled, "how it will delight him to go to C'hi Ng Yelü and negotiate the marriage of the noble C'hi's accomplished and virtuous daughter and the loathsome, ignorant, deformed son of the lady Sên Ruby!"

Still the woman smiled.

"But, I say, Mater, I think I ought to tell Cousin Charles what we are up to—don't you?—before it is signed, sealed and delivered. He *has* been almost Providence to me, hasn't he? And so jolly good to me always. I think I owe him that courtesy. I'll blow in at Kow's shop this afternoon, shall I? And then go on to Sir Charles and have my talk with him while you are giving your orders to Kow."

"Why not this morning, Rue? Chinese affairs of great moment should be begun at the sun-up." Ruby Sên knew that Ruben had said "this afternoon" because he would not leave her abruptly, or even seem willing to; but she had set her foot, her naked woman's foot, on the hot plowshare of Ruben's young man-desire, and she meant to stint her sacrifice of nothing.

And she knew that, though his lips and his love of her—his cherishing of her and of her *first* place—had said, "this afternoon," the heart of the man she had borne was crying, "now!"

But Ruben was fine too.

"Not much sun-up about it in London to-day, is there! No, please. There's not all *that* hurry. I haven't seen my mother for weeks. You needn't think I am going to let you turn me out until after lunch for I am not! The morning is ours, Mrs. Sên, whether you like it or not. After we have

lunched I'll trot off to the picturesque suburb of Bloomsbury and then on to the House of Snow."

His mother's laugh thanked him.

But perhaps she would have found it easier to have had him go now. It had to be done—so, the quicker the easier. And Mrs. Sên would have liked to be alone—just for an hour—now.

## CHAPTER LVIII

**K**OW LI wept—unashamed.

The old Chinese in his happiness shook like willow leaves in stormtime.

He fell at his master's feet and blessed them.

Then he bobbed up as if his old body had been provided with very excellent springs, and began rummaging chests and wardrobes, almost forgetting and quite ignoring Sên Ruben's presence, in his tremulous, tremendous excitement in selecting the costliest and most beautiful garments he owned, coat, cap and petticoat, shoes, pouch, top coat and fan for the most important toilet of his lifetime. The servant-crest of the Sêns would show for all to see on his shoulders and breast when he waited upon the lady Sên Ruby and when, her *mei jên*, he waited upon the lord C'hi Ng Yelü. That servant-crest blazoned the proudest fact of his life, but the raiment it jeweled and ennobled would be fine and beautiful, as befitted the go-between sent by a Sên to a C'hi.

Ruben spoke, and Kow did not hear him. Kow Li was drenching a singlet of gossamer silk with costly perfumes.

Ruben stood and watched the old millionaire servant, and Ruben Sên's laughing blue eyes were very tender.

Kow Li made a wonderful toilet. A Son of Heaven might have worn it at a proud palace function. Ruben wondered

if any servant would have been licensed to go abroad so finely clad in China. And he wondered with a grin how Kow Li proposed to journey so clad across London.

It takes a great deal to astonish London. Victoria Street and Hyde Park are blasé to extreme sartorial exhibitions that run a gamut from the unique toilets of ultra-modish ladies to those of Hottentot potentates. But Sên had no doubt that Kow Li would astonish and stir London to-day and he grinned again to think what C'hi Ng Yelü's stolid English servants would feel at the sight of Kow Li ko'towing at Mr. C'hi's hall door.

Kow Li, clad at last, surveyed himself severely in the long lacquer-framed glass and grunted with satisfaction.

Still trembling with happiness and swelling with importance, he padded from god to god—and this room of his was full of gods—and lit before each god as many joss-sticks as he could find receptacles to hold.

Kow Li's lips were moving in prayer, more filial and respectful, more leisured and earnest than the god-ones of China always get.

Ruben spoke again; Kow answered at random in a quavering voice, and Sên slipped quietly away and off on his own good errand—off to tell Sir Charles Snow, his father's tried and trusted friend and Ruben's own.

It was a long way from Kow's curio shop to the Snows' home, but Ruben walked it because he did not think to hail a taxi or see any one of the many that hailed him.

Ruben Sên need not have been quite so keenly amused at old Kow Li. Young love can do things as absurd as ever does old love that has loved a lifetime. Love that has lasted a lifetime has the finer dignity, the deeper sanctities. Love of kindred, love of lover are not the only loves. Kow Li's love of his Sên was older than he; it was lifetime old, and as old as their old, old race.

Ruben Sên crossed London on a rainbow. All life was a-shimmer. He cut an intimate acquaintance on Pall Mall, a man he had chummed with at Eton and Cambridge, and he very nearly lost his life at Hyde Park Corner—and never knew that he had done either. Why should he? He was off to Paradise *via* the Snows! Half an hour with his Cousin Charles, perhaps, and then back to wait with his mother until Kow came with C'hi Ng Yelü's answer.

There'd be none of the long-drawn-out premarital barter that there so often was in China. All he had he was willing to give—oh, so gladly. A Sên who was Sên King-lo's heir and dear old Kow Li's needed no dower with his bride. Not that C'hi Ng Yelü would barter either. Yamei was the pulse of Ng Yelü's heart—his only child.

There need be no more delay than their tender care of Yamei's dignity necessitated. She should have all the delicacy of approach that was her Chinese birthright. But he thought that even of that C'hi Ng Yelü would not prove a stickler.

Dear old Sir Charlie—how pleased he would be!

How soon would he be permitted to see her again?

Would she pale or flush? Both, he thought. Would she blush first, or laugh a little brokenly, or lose first the lovely cherries painted on her cheeks? Would she look at him?

No—he was almost sure that she would not look at him at first.

And while Ruben trod the London streets in ecstasy, walking on the golden air of anticipation, Ruby his mother sat alone and took new stock of her altered life.

She had gone to her own room when Ruben left her, telling them to send Kow Li to her when he came, but to disturb her for nothing else whatsoever.

She sat facing King-lo's picture, the companion of so many

of her hours, and she thought Lo's dark eyes regarded her tenderly and approved her.

She had failed him in their marriage. Little by little she had realized it as her widowed years had gathered in on her. While he had lived she had not suspected it. King-lo had not let her suspect it—not even in Ho-nan where she had slighted his people's welcome, had shrunk from his kindred, recoiled from his Chinese home, spurned his Chinese home life that he had so deeply loved.

She might have been so much more to King-lo; might have rounded out in perfect harmony his life that she had dwarfed and pricked. She had repented it, little by little, when it was too late to atone to him at all. She repented it now—and now she would not fail him. She could not heal Ivy's life; only Baby and Tom—and God—could do that. But she would not stunt their only son's life, neither maim, nor scorch, nor chill it.

She would share it as she had not shared King-lo's.

That atonement she still could make.

She would make it fully, she would make it freely.

What was she to set her judgment, her prejudices and narrow pride of race, against such a husband's Chinese judgment and preference—or Ruben's! Reading backward with the cleared sight of ripe maturity and suffering, she saw herself less than dust before the precious stone of King-lo's character—less than nothing weighed by his unalterable manliness; she a peasant whom a king had espoused and cherished; a pauper in character whose debts he had paid and canceled; she had been womanish, Sên King-lo had been a man.

One need not repeat mistakes; that was the one good thing about them.

She would not repeat her mistake of long ago. It had been



a mistake of ignorance then; now it would be a mistake of willfulness, a crime of selfishness.

What right had she to say with which of his two races Ruben should identify himself—to which he should prepledge his children? None.

She would welcome C'hi Yamei; she would do it sincerely.

She would love Ruben's wife.

If they made their home in Ho-nan—Ruben in his heart would wish it, she suspected, as Sên King-lo had longed for it—she would make her home there, if she found that she could do it without intruding, and without cramping or discounting their life there.

Or—if that were beyond her compassing—she would live her life out alone at Ashacres, and here in London in such contentment of loneliness as she could muster; seeing Ruben sometimes—she was sure she could count upon that much!—writing to him, hearing from him.

She had lost Ivy. She would not lose Ruben.

And she would stay near him, wherever he lived, if she could do it without embarrassment to him. What was country? What were customs—the food one ate, the clothes one wore? Not much to the companionship and friendship of a widow's only son and of her grandchildren.

She would *be* Chinese. It was her right—she the wife of a Sên, the mother of Sêns.

She had learned to care for China since King-lo had gone. She would seek out its beauties and wealths and make them hers. His people should be hers and he would know, and be glad.

She had clung to her Chinese widowhood, had flaunted it even. She had boasted that she was Chinese. She would make it true now.

But Ruby Sên's face was drawn as she sat alone by her

fire building her dream of love and sacrifice. She knew that she would miss England and English ways. She knew that she could but wish that Ruben had loved and chosen elsewhere. It would have cost her less to have held out motherly arms and a kind welcome to an English girl.

Her hands clasped on her knee were clenched, and her eyes were pinched with pain that was stronger than she as she sat there alone waiting for Kow Li.

She was glad when at last Kow came. The sooner the better now!

## CHAPTER LIX

SIR CHARLES was at home and alone.

No one lived who was happier than Ruben Sên was when he went into Snow's den.

He felt assured that his love would not be refused. He was contented to wait a few hours, even a few days, because so much delay was due to C'hi Yamei. Kow Li would make a perfect go-between. And since he could not be with Yamei yet, it would be the next best thing to hear Sir Charles' congratulations.

He knew how glad his Cousin Charles would be, how warmly and sincerely Snow would congratulate, and how his kinsman and best friend of friends would approve!

Snow heard him out without a word, and the old man's face was all kindness and friendship and understanding; nothing but that.

Then—very slowly, quietly, fully—Charles Snow told Ruben Sên Sên King-lo's story; told the son his father's *true* story.

Snow exaggerated nothing; he softened nothing.

Ruben stiffened—then slouched brokenly in his chair.

It was some time before Ruben spoke and when Snow had said it all, he said no more.

"You mean," Ruben began hoarsely, and broke off miserably.

"That I think you ought not to do it, Rue—ought not to marry at all. I believe it myself very strongly, have no doubt about it at all. Your father had none. It was his wish, his request to you when he was dying. I wish I had told you sooner. I thought there was plenty of time, but I had no business to think so. I ought to have told you long ago. I wish to God I had. And if you had not come to me to-day, I should have sent to you to come to me to-morrow. I'd give more than I can say not to have put it off—until the mischief was done."

"That need not trouble you, sir," Sên said huskily. "The mischief—at least to me—would have been done all the same. That part of it is of no importance. My father loved my mother dearly, didn't he?"

"Very dearly and to the end. But it cost him too much, Ruben; it cost him more than the love of any woman is worth to any man. Exile broke your father's heart, Ruben; home-sickness killed him. And his death was a death of terror because he feared that you and Ivy might marry; knew what it probably would cost you not to marry—especially Ivy—and knew what it was bound to cost your children or theirs if you did."

"But he was happy with Mother?"

"As happy with her as a man who has mismarried can be. Happy in her herself, and in serving and shielding her."

"She never knew?"

"Never. He kept it from her and it cost him his life—as noble and fine a man as ever lived. I think you will obey him, Ruben. You are made of his stuff, unless I have misunderstood you all these years."

"Did you tell Ivy what he said?"

"No—because I knew that it would do no good and much harm. I could not save Ivy. But I told Gaylor—you know with what result. I have told you because I believe that you will let me save you."

"Save me!"

"Yes—exactly that. And save C'hi Yamei."

Ruben Sên screened his face with his hands.

Sir Charles went on—because he must. "I believe that you will let your father save you. I am saying all this to you for him—saying it in his name, at his request. I believe that you will come to see it as he did, and will yield—because you are a Sên."

Again they were silent.

Then, "But to be perfectly fair, I must tell you also that your father hoped that, if you decided against his wish, and married in spite of it, you would marry a Chinese girl"—the gray misery on Ruben's face lifted a little—"one more or less Westernized, the daughter of some Chinese family living, and apt to stay, in England." Ruben's face grayed again at that.

"Sên King-lo knew that you were Chinese, and knew that little Ivy was English. It was for her he feared most."

"Ivy has been very happy since she married," Ruben interrupted.

"Very. But her Chinese-faced baby has destroyed her happiness. Her misery at its birth was pretty bad. Your Cousin Emma was there."

"It is a Chinese girl I wish to marry. While Mother lives I shall make my home where Mother prefers to live—here, of course."

"But your heart is in China."

"My heart is in China and, if I lost my mother, no matter how many years from now, I should go home to China and stay there."

"On my soul, I believe you belong there!"

"Thank you, sir."

Sir Charles smiled a little sadly.

"All true, Ruben," the older man went on. "If you marry, this marriage you propose is as little against your father's judgment as any you could possibly make. But his last prayer was that you would refrain from marriage."

"Because of my children?"

"Chiefly because of your children, and of theirs—but not altogether. Remember, Ruben, your father had tried it out loyally and earnestly, tried it out with the one woman he ever loved and whose companionship was infinite delight to him always. She never palled on him. How many husbands do you believe can say that? Your mother was the one great personal love of your father's life. He could not remember his mother. You have your mother. He tried it out for all it was worth, Rue—put up the finest fight I have ever seen; and he lost. And he was a man of tireless pluck and of infinite tact. But it broke him—heart, soul and body. His last years were lived in torment. His marriage was a sacrifice. When he was dying in the garden at Ashacres he begged you not to marry; I believe that he is begging you not to now—personally and actually—begging you from his still troubled life somewhere on-High."

Ruben Sên turned his face down on his arm; his shoulders were not steady.

Sir Charles Snow gave him time.

"But," Sên argued again, "my children would be preponderantly Chinese."

"We should hope so—*actually* so, as well as in blood proportion. But Nature is a jealous god. Nature plays nasty tricks—sometimes many generations after. It is safer to count on Nature's vengeance than on her forgiveness."

Sên put up still one more protest.



"Kow Li probably has gone to C'hi Ng Yelü already—Mother was sending him. Just possibly C'hi Ng Yelü has consented already."

"That is too bad," Snow said gravely. "But it is not betrothal, even so. Not until the gifts have been exchanged. And C'hi is not the man to hold you to such a promise if you did not wish to fulfill it."

Ruben could not deny that.

"I was with her yesterday, sir. I—I think it would hurt C'hi Yamei, if it were broken off."

"That was what your father said when I tried to persuade him, as I *and he* are trying to persuade you to-day. It was that that clinched it—their marriage—with your father. He took the risk for her sake to spare her temporary hurt and humiliation—took the risk for you and Ivy that he forbids you to take, Ruben! It will be less unkindness to C'hi Yamei to so pain her now, than to let her live to hear her children called 'mongrels.'"

Sên Ruben winced as Sir Charles had seen his father Sên King-lo wince at the same thrust a quarter of a century ago in Washington.

After a moment Ruben got up heavily and moved to the door.

Neither spoke again, but Sên gave Sir Charles a not discourteous look before he opened the door and went.

Slowly Sir Charles Snow struck a match, sighing deeply. Snow believed that this time he had won.

## CHAPTER LX

SÊN stumbled home.

Mrs. Sên looked up with a sunny smile as he came into her room. The effort and strain it cost her to show a complacence she did not feel were so sharp and hard that

they blinded her to the change in him—a gait that shambled a little, pallor, hurt eyes, a mouth clenched and drawn.

“Has Kow been?” Ruben asked abruptly.

“And gone. He should be back before long, unless they exchange incredibly long Chinese speeches. I told them to send him up here—and told him to come up as soon as he did get back. Rue, he was a picture! I never saw such a sight in my life. If Mr. C’hi is not vastly impressed by the sumptuous get-up of my *mei jên*, all I can say is, he ought to be!”

Ruben nodded—as nearly brightly as he could, and sat down wearily.

“Oh—well, it doesn’t matter,” he murmured listlessly. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Doesn’t matter? What doesn’t matter? Why, Rue, what is wrong?” Her son’s distress had reached her. “Cousin Charles didn’t rag you?”

“No,” Sên answered with a weary smile.

“Of course not! And you would have snapped your fingers at it if he had. But something has gone wrong since you left me. What?”

Ruben Sên looked full in his mother’s face. The misery in his eyes knifed her; she saw his set face break, his clenched mouth waver and twitch.

“Ruben!”

Before Sên could answer—if he could have answered just then—Kow Li came through the door, closed it behind him, and bowed profoundly to them both.

There was no Chinese impassivity on that old yellow face. It blazed with joy and pride as unmistakably as his bedecked person blazed and crackled with embroidered satins and furlined, coral-buttoned silks. The slant old eyes twinkled like glow-worms, his thin lips were pursed in triumph, and he waved his tiny ridiculous unfurled fan with all the pomp

with which a peacock spreads his tail. Kow Li radiated congratulation, joy and self-complacency.

Ruben Sên smothered a groan; the woman choked back a sigh; she had had scant hope that C'hi would send back an unfavorable reply. She had tried not to hope it but her first glance at Kow Li assured her that Kow had not failed, scarcely had needed to ask, and that C'hi Ng Yelü had not even pretended to be less than pleased and willing, but had scorned to assume towards the suit of a Sên the strong parental reluctance that would have been the better Chinese etiquette. C'hi Ng Yelü had welcomed the proposal, would make no difficulties at all of any sort, was fully prepared to cut out all the preliminary bargainings and cross-negotiations that even an easy-going C'hi Ng Yelü who had a shred of family self-respect must have insisted upon in China. The match was made! Ruby Sên's breast quivered once in spite of her. But her smile was cordial and serene.

And Ruben saw what she saw. C'hi had given him Yamei!

And he must slaughter the gift—leave it untouched—thrust it back!

He had heard his father's voice in Snow's study. It was not Sir Charles who had convinced him; it was Sên King-lo who had convinced and sentenced him; sentenced him to life-long soul-ache, everlasting longing and loneliness; sentenced him to put slight upon the maid he worshiped heart and body; sentenced him too, perhaps, to hurt her!

It did not occur to Sên Ruben to evade the sentence. A Chinese son must pay his father's debts to the last fraction of a *cash*, to the last husk of one millet seed.

Sên King-lo had sinned against his blood—had defiled the blood of China and defiled his Clan. Reparation must be made; the mixed blood must not continue to be dispersed through Sên veins. The debt must be paid. Sên King-lo's son must make the bitter sacrificial payment.

So Sên Ruben saw it.

What he might suffer—or C'hi Yamei—was nothing to the cleansing of a father's crime, less than nothing to the rehabilitation of the honor, the family purity, of the Sêns.

Ruben Sên did not flinch; he knew that he should not flinch again. But his soul was sick, his heart was blistered, and his flesh ached.

In itself the hideous payment was terrible; but there was more! He must give no sign. While they lived never must his mother know; never must she suspect why he did what irrevocably was his to do.

That, perhaps, was the hardest of all and doubly hard; for not only must he hide that he was hurt, and that he had made a sacrifice, but—for his mother's sake—he must brand himself poltroon, turn-coat, jilt.

He must do a noble thing as if it were a foulness; he must make his sacrifice look a treachery.

Sir Charles would know. But Sir Charles Snow would not speak. No one else must even suspect, least of all his mother.

No one—but C'hi Ng Yelü. Even the gods would grant him that—that he might explain—show his soul—to Yamei's father. And C'hi Ng Yelü would tell Yamei what he would.

He must leave C'hi Yamei to her father now, C'hi Yamei whose life he had thought to keep and cherish in his own.

He should not see Yamei again.

He would not see Yamei again.

Kow Li was bursting to speak. But Kow Li far sooner would have died than have smirched this great occasion by such foul breach of Chinese etiquette.

Kow Li's lips twitched, his petticoat rattled with the agitation of his knees; but he might not speak until they questioned or bade him say—the lady Sên Ruby who had sent him on her perfumed errand or the lord Sên Ruben who was his worm-and-servant's master.

Ruben rose, and stood facing them both. His face was grave but it was calm; and his voice was clear and steady.

"The lord C'hi Ng Yelü did not repulse our offer."

"Oh, great and worshiped master"—Kow Li *had* to speak.

But Sên checked him with an upheld hand. "I regret that he did not, for there will be no such marriage."

"Ruben!"

"I have changed my mind, Mother," Sên told her quietly.

"I do not believe it! Changed your mind! You, Ruben!"

Nor did Kow Li believe it for an instant. The old Sên servant did not attempt to speak; he could not have spoken, had Sên Ruben bade him. But a long angry hiss lashed out from between his grinning lips—a hiss that was Kow Li's oath to rip out the life of the only Englishman he ever had entirely liked and respected, the one Western that he had ever trusted.

Kow Li knew who had done this. Mrs. Sên had told him that Ruben had gone to Snow in courtesy to tell him what was afoot. And Snow had found some hellish way to prevent Sên Ruben's purpose.

Presently—when he found leisure and convenience—he would take the life of Sir Charles Snow. But that was nothing at this moment; one did not turn from the jungle path to crush a flea when one hunted a tiger. There was more importance than that small thing to do now; the Englishman's dastard necromancy was to undo now. It should not stand or prevail. Sir Charles Snow who had pretended friendship and loyalty for Sên King-lo and for Sên Ruben, who had pretended that he liked and revered China, should not spoil the life of Sên Ruben and dishonor and balk the best hope of the Sêns. Kow was bitterly disappointed in Sên Ruben—humiliated that a Sên had so proved weakling, cheap wax to be melted by a mere Englishman's treacherous breath.

There is not much that is bitterer than to despise what we



most love. Kow Li was despising Sên Ruben now. Kow Li never had despised a Sên before, he who had served them man and boy for all his lifetime, and in the service of his fathers had served them faithfully for thousands of years.

Why had the vile Englishman wrought this thing? Gods! because he had some other wife of his own selection whom he intended Sên Ruben to wed—an English wife!

And again a long sound of a scorpion that hissed its rage thrashed across the room.

"Ruben," Mrs. Sên asked, "what did Cousin Charles say to you? You have *not* changed your mind. It is useless for you to tell me that; I know you too well. It is absurd! You have not and, if you had, your mother would tell you that you must not. You told me yourself that you had as good as told Miss C'hi and probably her father *has* told her now. You are Sên King-lo's son; I shall not forget that, even if you do!"

Kow Li's being ko'towed to a white woman! It had not happened before.

"Mother," Sên answered gently, "it was not Cousin Charles. I cannot explain now—it would take too long—and there is a thing I must do at once. The credit or discredit is not Sir Charles'—it is my own, you may believe me. And we must leave it at that—for to-day."

"If you say so, you think so, I know. But I am sure that it was," Mrs. Sên persisted. "He tried to prevent our marriage, your father's and mine." Kow Li's old eyes widened before they narrowed to a line; he had not known that before. "I forgave him—a long time afterwards. But I ought to have remembered, and not have encouraged you to go to him to-day. He did all he could to spoil my life once; he shall not spoil yours!"

"Nothing shall," Sên promised gravely. "I give you my

word of honor, Mother," he added, "that not an iota of the responsibility is his—Cousin Charles'."

"Whoever—whatever is responsible, you simply cannot do it, my son. What would your father say if he knew? Over and over I have heard him say that a Chinese promise cannot be broken. Your father would be ashamed of you, Ruben."

She did not see Ruben wince at that, but Kow Li saw, and a glimmer of the truth flickered towards his mind—and Kow Li was sorely troubled.

"I am ashamed of you, Ruben. I never thought to be that! But you cannot do it; you cannot break your word to the woman you have wooed—a Chinese girl, Ruben! Your Sên blood—Chinese blood—has been your great pride. You have seemed English because you look it, and because you have lived here all your life. But you have been Chinese always. I have been glad that you were, and I have wished that he might have known it. Perhaps he does know it, Ruben; know that I bore him a Chinese son. I hope he does. You must be Chinese in this, Ruben. There is divorce in China—not frequently, but there is; but a Chinese betrothal *never* is broken; even death cannot break it."

Kow Li gestured confirmation gravely.

"There is no betrothal," Sên reminded them. "Nothing makes one or binds either family until the first gifts have been exchanged. No one is pledged—thank God! Kow has sounded C'hi—that is all."

"Rubbish!"

"I am sorry to seem in the wrong—in this—to you, Mother," Sên pleaded, "but I must take my way in it."

"Think of that poor girl!"

"I shall think of C'hi Yamei while I live—as I have since that first time at Burlington House. Kow—old friend—we

are sorry to have sent you on a bootless errand. Go now."

Kow Li never had disobeyed a Sên. He backed towards the door. He looked to have shriveled; all his splendid raiment hung about him limply. Kow Li went without a word; at the door he bowed to them both profoundly. He did not look again at Sên Ruben his master, but he gave Sên Ruby a deep look of supplication.

She might succeed when they two were alone! And, if she did, Kow Li would worship her as he worshiped the Spirit of Sên Ya Tin.

"Rue"—she held out her hand, and Sên went to her, and sat down beside her on the arm of her chair, and touched her hair with his hand—"it was rather curt dismissal for poor old Kow that! But we'll make it up to him! Now, dear, that we are alone—just you and I—you'll explain?"

"Not to-day, Mother. I can't stand much more now—and I have something to do that is not easy."

"Is it something about the C'his?—tell me that much," the mother whispered.

"No!"

The puzzled woman knew that Ruben had answered her truthfully.

She left it then—for the present. She would see Charles before she probed or fretted Ruben again.

They stayed so while her little jeweled clock ticked several minutes into the past.

Then Ruben bent down and kissed his mother.

"I am going out again, dear. But I'll be back in time for dinner."

"Not—" she began.

"Yes—to C'hi Ng Yelü. I must explain to him as far as I can; and I must not put it off. Miss C'hi was going to the Mortons' this afternoon. If she did, C'hi has said nothing to her yet. And I would rather speak with him when she is

not at home. We might meet accidentally—and I'd rather not. I'll be back for dinner, dear."

Mrs. Sên made no attempt to dissuade or to delay him; she did not dare.

## CHAPTER LXI

THE things that we anticipate with the most dread almost always gall us less than we feared they would.

One can suffer only so much at any one time over any one thing; it is one of the great mercies of human existence that each individual's capacity for pain is strictly limited. If dread is craven coward, sufficiently applied it turns anæsthetic, and numbs the nerves it first has tortured. Often, too, the bad quarters of an hour we agonize over in the night have a gracious habit of blowing over. Again, the creditor we face quakingly and with raw humiliation proves rather a jolly good fellow at shorter range, and lets us down softly.

His interview with C'hi Ng Yelü was harder and worse than Sên had expected it to be; and he had counted upon its being incredibly difficult and painful.

He was taken to C'hi at once. It was evident that the servant who let him in had had his orders.

As they went through the hall Sên Ruben heard a girl laugh—a clear, soft laugh of perfect happiness. C'hi *had* told her, and she was glad! Ruben believed that a note he never had heard before in Yamei's flute-like voice told him that!

She would not come to her father's room unless she was sent for—perhaps not even then, while he was there—Ruben was sure of that; nor would she come downstairs at all. She would run no risk of meeting him in the hall—if only she learned that he was here! But it unmanned him to know

that she was in the house at all. It made what he was going to do seem more dastardly, a more intimate, more brutal affront to her whom he loved. Was she wearing her Chinese dress again to-day? He thought so! And she had not cared to go to the Morton "at home." Had she one of his roses—yesterday's roses—tucked in her little jacket?—nestling at her chin perhaps! What was she doing up there in that room? They had been together there yesterday! Pranking gently up there with her little Chinese dogs, perhaps. Or was she standing beside the piano, bending over a bowl of yellow roses, telling them, laughing it to them shyly—her love story? Her love story and his! Gods!

C'hi Ng Yelü did not give him a Chinese welcome, but swept Sên's low obeisance of deep respect aside with a chuckle, caught Ruben's hand and shook it warmly.

"Sit down, my dear fellow, have a cigar. We are not in China—we won't pretend that we are. You really should not perpetrate a ko'tow in English-cut trousers; the two don't click."

He took Sên by the shoulders and pushed him down willy-nilly into an easy chair—an ideal chair to smoke in and to lounge in, but no chair at all to make black confession in. It was not a chair to sit in while you affronted a man telling him that you withdrew your offer of marriage, insulting his daughter!

Ruben took the cigar—too embarrassed to decline it—and laid it down.

C'hi chuckled again. "'Pon my word, Sên, that funny old bird—Kow Li, isn't he?—nearly caused a riot in the hall. One of the housemaids was passing through the hall when Billings let him in, and caught sight of him. She scuttled down to the housekeeper's room in high hysterical delight, and I gather, from the sounds that penetrated a wall and three doors, that every domestic retainer I have was lined up



in the hall, and peeping over the staircase to feast their eyes on him as he went. Some *mei jên*, what, Sên! He certainly did you credit!"

"He felt greatly honored to come, sir," Sên said ruefully.

"He dressed the part!" C'hi chuckled again.

Sên Ruben began at once—haltingly, lamely enough.

C'hi Yelü smoked, and heard him through without a word. He gave no sign—even he smiled—coldly, once or twice. But Ruben felt C'hi stiffen, and knew that C'hi Ng Yelü's Chinese blood was boiling and frothing.

When Sên had done, C'hi bowed to him graciously across the table, then spoke with almost elaborate courtesy.

"You are quite right, Sên. Pray do not distress yourself about the little incident in the least. Believe me that I do not; I assure you that I do not. And my daughter never will know of it. I have not mentioned it to her." Sên Ruben believed it a lie, and applauded it. "Much of what you have just urged against what was suggested to me, by Mrs. Sên's messenger a few hours ago, I already felt very strongly, but I preferred not to state such delicate objections to a mere go-between who had been sent to me by a Sên—preferred to temporize, because of my great regard for your noble clan. But to you yourself I must have stated my objections quite frankly before we went any farther—to you, of course, not to Mrs. Sên—"

"Thank you, sir."

"I do not take the slight race difference quite as seriously as you do. I think you exaggerate it—on my soul, I do—but frankly, in spite of my very great regard for you, while I should not have forced my daughter's inclination—I resolved long ago never to do that—I should have regretted the arrangement had it been arranged. But I have reason to think that if, after our conference—yours and mine—I had been persuaded to broach it to her, she would have de-

clined it. I feel that I can say this to you without offense, because I am confident that you will be glad to know that Miss C'hi's personal interest has not become involved."

"Very glad, sir," Sên forced out through stiff lips. He admired C'hi Ng Yelü enormously.

"My girl likes and values you very much as a friend. But I am sure that she would have asked me to decline the unquestionably great honor that Mrs. Sên's suggestion did us both."

"Father!" C'hi Yamei cried gaily, dancing lightly in from the hall, "I want you to come and—" Then she saw that C'hi Ng Yelü was not alone, saw who was with him and stood a moment motionless in confusion, her lovely face crimson as a bride's veil. Then with a little smothered cry she fled from the room.

He had seen her again—in yesterday's robes; and he had seen the bunch of yellow roses at her breast.

Sên had sprung up at the sound of her voice; he turned away and went to the window, and standing there with his back to the room Sên Ruben set his teeth hard in his lip.

C'hi had risen too—to go to his child, to ask her gently to excuse him until his business talk—of matters at Peking—with Mr. Sên was finished.

But he had not needed to do that—Yamei had not given him time.

Perhaps her coming, and what her confusion—and something else in her eyes before she dropped them—had told, had moved C'hi Yamei's father as intensely as it had Sên Ruben.

C'hi did not sit down again—he went to the window.

"Ruben!"

Sên swung round.

C'hi Ng Yelü's face was working. Sên's was ghastly.

"Ruben, let us sit down again, and talk this over sensibly.

We must thrash it out now—without pride or subterfuge; there is too much involved for either.”

“Let me go, sir,” Sên pleaded.

“Not yet!” C’hi Ng Yelü urged, as one who asks a favor, but asks it as a right.

They both sat down.

“I do not know just what report of how he fared with me the *mei jên* Kow Li gave, or if you have seen him.”

“I have seen him, sir—but he said very little. I—I put it off.”

“It doesn’t matter either way. I indicated to him that your mother’s offer was not unwelcome to me. It was not. It is not. I wish the marriage, Sên. I approach no man for C’hi Yamei; there are few whose approach of me I would have welcomed, few that I would have reported to her. She has not lacked suitors; she will not, for she is beautiful and sweet and I am rich. But I care for her happiness more than I care for all other things, more than I ever have cared for any other thing but her mother’s and the love her mother gave me. My care for C’hi Yamei’s happiness is more than my pride. You are not bound to go on with the contract which I believed was made—I do not hold you so bound—but I want you to consider gravely what this sudden decision of yours may do to Yamei.” Ruben moaned. “She has not lived the life of a Chinese girl here where we have spent so much of our time, nor has she lived it at all strictly in China. She has seen a good deal of you, Sên. She may have read what was in your heart until to-day.”

“It is there still. It always will be there,” Sên muttered miserably.

“She may have understood; she may have responded, as English girls do. You saw her now—she flushed and ran away. Why? We live in changed times now, even we Chinese. The Son of Heaven himself has chosen to go among

men as a man of the new ways. We may see a Chinese Empress unveiled and unpainted at a London function before long; little would surprise me in this time of flux and transition. The bars are down, Sên. We cannot put them up, you and I. I, for one, do not wish to put them up again. I want China to find her rightful place in the sun—and not in insular isolation. I may be wrong, I may be right; but that is how I feel about it. I do not feel that your Western blood is an advantage to mine; but is it the insuperable barrier that your fine sensitiveness thinks it? I believe not."

C'hi Ng Yelü said more—a good deal more.

Sên made little reply.

But the sum of all he said remained, "I must pay my father's debt." And he also said that he would not do C'hi Yamei what, as he saw it now, would be an irrevocable wrong; that he would not put her, as marriage with him must inevitably put her in both hemispheres, at social discount.

C'hi Ng Yelü bowed to a decision he saw that he could not shake; and they parted friends.

As C'hi heard the outer door close, he went heavily across the hall, up the stairs, and reluctantly into Yamei's room. He would not delay his telling her what he must tell; the sooner the wound, the sooner its cure—if he and time and her own pride and youth could cure the hurt it was his sorrowful lot to deal his only child.

Ruben went slowly, with feet that disliked their office. It was improbable that he would come here again; he hoped that he should not. But he could not go abruptly. He had to linger and lag—weakly, perhaps—keeping a last lonely tryst with the house from which he shut himself out forever; prolonging still the "sweet sorrow" of his parting.

The Square was empty, and Sên waited a few moments looking up at Yamei's windows—the window where they had stood together yesterday. The window was open.

Was she there?

Had C'hi gone to her yet? He knew that C'hi Ng Yelü would not put off long the difficult cruel-kindness that had been thrust upon him.

A cry! Yamei had cried out—and then he heard her sob. A little hurt girl was weeping bitterly.

Sên Ruben went wearily home.

The next day he and his mother went to Ashacres; and Ruben Sên never saw C'hi Yamei again.

## CHAPTER LXII

“**Y**OU haven't dressed? You told me to order the car for four.”

“I don't want to go to the garden party, Tom. I'm sick of functions. London gets hotter and hotter—and dustier and grubbier—and all the people we know grow stupider and stupider every day!”

“I'm blowed!” But Tom Gaylor was inured to surprises of various sorts from his wife.

“I want to go home—to Dorset. I want to go now, Tom.”

“You do! Right! That suits me down to the ground. Best Christmas present I've had since I was six. London is abominably stuffy just now, if you ask me; and garden parties never were my dying request; invention of Satan, I call 'em. I'm your traveling companion with all the heart in the world. When shall we go? Next week? I don't suppose we could manage to-morrow—or Monday—could we, Ivy?”

“I want to go now.”

“To-day?”

“Now.”

“Well—I *am* blowed. Always were a decisive girl though, weren't you? It's now we go. Wait till I find a hat, and



tell Jones to tank up good and plenty. It's a goodish distance my lady wife is taking me, and not too many dumps to get good Mex this side of Winchester. We can just about make home for nine o'clock dinner, if we don't get run in for speeding. You'd better 'phone Mrs. Clegg or Briggs or there won't be any dinner. I don't forget the one-course banquet of dried haddock and egg sauce they gave me the last time I blew in unexpected. Got a few people dining here to-night, haven't we? You sit down and write them a few untruthful telegrams while I negotiate Jones. Shall we take your maid with us, or send her by train?"

"I don't care who goes with us, if only we can start now. And we'll be off a good deal sooner if you talk a good deal less!"

"Mrs. Gaylor, the rest is silence. What about tea? We can get it at Winchester! Jolly decent tea there last time."

"None this. Sandwiches and a thermos. Ring that bell. I am not going to stop at Winchester or anywhere else. I'll be ready in exactly fifteen minutes; see that you are, and that Jones is—petrol and all."

"Madame, I shall in all my best obey you."

"Do get along and do it, then!"

"Right!" And Gaylor made for the hall and Jones, laughing and flinging another apt Shakespearian tag at Ivy as he went. He was riotously glad to be going home. The rabbits would be thick as fleas, melons and the last peaches dead ripe—and the geese eating their heads off.

In their Dorset home the battle began which Mrs. Sên had foreseen was inevitable, but which Lady Snow had believed was already lost; a terrible silent battle between Ivy herself and her old rankling sore and humiliation on the one side, and on the other a little dark-skinned baby and mother-love.

At first Gaylor thought that it was "coming all right."

Ivy spent long hours with her baby, in the house and in the gardens; and watching them, when Ivy did not know that he was near, he saw Ivy—several times—cuddling the little dark face to hers, picking its tiny fingers apart, counting its toes; once he saw the young mother laugh at her child, and the baby gurgled and grinned in delightful return.

It was a bonnie baby, delicately fat, dimpled, ready to smile at a hint, perfectly willing to lie on its back by the hour and stare straight up at nothing in a grave friendly way. It would grip your finger with the grip of a determined rosebud petal, it snatched at trinkets, did its best to swallow its own doubled fist, adored the absurdest faces you could make at it, chortled and shook with amusement when you tickled it under its very soft chin, listened appreciatively when you whistled or sang or made the most gruesome noises. It loved bright colors, cooed to the sunset, held out its hands for every flower it saw. It never cried, and it had the three deeply marked wrinkles on each wee wrist which the Chinese call the bracelet of lifelong good luck. In short, it was a baby that would have been proclaimed and adored in any courtyard from the Jade Gate to Shanghai.

Ivy was happy and natural—for a time; then the revulsion came.

She avoided her child.

Her eyes grew haggard and hard.

She took to sitting alone, far off in the garden, or locked in her own room. Touching her pillow by chance in the dark, Gaylor felt it wet. Twice when he woke he felt that she had not slept. More than twice he woke in the night and missed her, and found her pacing up and down in some other room in the dark.

Baby had lost the first round. Prejudice and old hurt pride had proved stronger than love and womanly instinct.

Gaylor longed to say something, do something—but what?

For the life of him he couldn't think what to say or to attempt; and fearing to blunder, shy of the subject too, he left it alone and was abominably worried—perplexed at a twisted situation as only a man, and an English man at that, can be. And he was miserable—not with any quantity or quality of misery approaching Ivy Gaylor's own—but quite as miserable as any mere man who is trying manfully to do his best ought ever to be made.

Mrs. Sên had been right—the little baby pulled its mother, but it could not prevail. She knew now that she loved it; but it could not comfort her. She revolted and rebelled for it and its future as for years she had for her own and for herself. The more she saw it, the more she shrank from it. The more she yearned over it, the more she recoiled.

The sight of her child—the sound of its voice—became a torture.

Gaylor was not surprised when his wife said defiantly one night at dinner, "I am going back to London in the morning."

"We'll go by car?" was all the comment he made.

"Unless you'd rather stay here and shoot—and farm."

Tom smiled. "I'd much rather go with you."

His wife's eyes fell to her plate.

She wished very much to say, "thank you" nicely, partly because she cordially thought he deserved it, partly because the servants were there—but a lump jumped in her throat and made her mute.

Except that he asked presently, at just what hour she would like to start, their going was not mentioned again until he went to her the next morning to ask if she were ready.

"Quite," Ivy said; and she already wore hat and coat and gloves.

Her husband looked at her with a longing in his eyes that she understood—and ignored.

"I won't be long," he said. "I'll just have a look at the kiddy."

Ivy nodded indifferently and made no motion to follow him to the nurseries.

Gaylor went very slowly, hoping in spite of himself that Ivy would come too just for a minute or two.

But she did not.

He was gone longer than she had expected, longer than he had intended; and when he came down Ivy had left the house, and was waiting for him in the car.

"Dear," her husband said, taking the door of the car from the servant's hand into his own, "Baby is ill—looks pretty queer to me, and nurse is frightened too. I don't suppose it's much, but I've 'phoned for Dr. Brand, and I think one of us ought to wait and see what he says. I won't go—not till Brand's been here anyway, if you don't mind."

"What a bore!" She tried to speak indifferently, but her face had blurred instantly. "She never has been ill before, has she?"

"I never heard she was," the man said awkwardly. Neither its father nor its mother knew much about how their baby had been most of its tender little life. Probably it had not been ill before; the most competent nurse scarcely would have failed to send word of any ailment more alarming than hiccups.

"I suppose we'd better stay," Mrs. Gaylor said grudgingly, "until the Doctor has seen her," but her husband felt her arm tremble as he drew her coat off in the hall. And Ivy Gaylor slipped her hand in his, and went up to the nursery with him. Tom had been afraid she would not go there. He almost had half feared she might go on to London as she had planned.

The man loved his wife better than he understood her.

At midnight Ivy's unwanted baby died in her arms.

Long after the little body had stiffened they could not take it from its mother.

And the old physician, watching Ivy Gaylor, drew Gaylor aside, beckoned the nurse to him, and said, "We must not push her now. We must not thwart Mrs. Gaylor in anything. This is going to half kill your wife, Mr. Gaylor. It may kill her. She will never get over it. Some mothers are stricken so at the loss of a child—not many, but some are. I have seen one or two in my own practice; I know the signs. Mrs. Gaylor will need infinite care and patience—and, above all tact. *We* cannot help her. There is nothing we can do but wait."

Something leapt at Gaylor's heart that was not all pain or grief.

"Please go," the mother said presently without looking up, and they left them alone—the girl-mother nursing her dead child.

For a long time the mother was as motionless as her baby.

Then—she pressed it to her a little closer, bent her face over it, and kissed it again and again, washing the little yellow face with her tears, washing her baby for burial.

Ivy tore her gown apart and pressed the tiny hands, ice cold, yellow baby hands, against her bosom.

Between her agonized sobs Ivy crooned to her little baby. The Chinese baby had won.

## CHAPTER LXIII

**Y**EARS—of mingled pleasure and pain, as most human years are—have passed.

The Gaylors jog on. Gaylor still chafes for a son—and knows that his wife will not again accept motherhood. But,



understanding her scruple but little, not sympathizing with it at all, he cleaves to her loyally—keeping the vows he gave her in marriage.

And he has his dogs and guns, his horses, a host of friends, a young cousin whose name also is Tom Gaylor, an upstanding public school boy whom he likes very much, and he has his cabbages and his tenants.

There are many unhappier women in London society than Ivy Gaylor, and not a few who are less envied. But her heart is buried deep in a tiny grave in Dorset. As long as she lives she will grieve and long for her little lost baby—grieve and will not be comforted.

Through obedience, renunciation and service Ruben Sên has won through to happiness.

He obeyed his father, renounced his young and bounding love, and all his life is a service of love to his mother. He has made her happiness; he has paid Sên King-lo's debt. And he knows that in the gods' good time he will go again to China—to live there among his own people, serving them, living for them, when his mother, gone on-High to Sên King-lo, no longer has earthly need of his services or his love.

He is content to wait.

Mrs. Sên and Ruben her son live more and more at Ash-acres, the bond between them closer, sweeter, firmer, as the slow moons come and go over Sên King-lo's grave in the churchyard of the old squat-towered Church of Brent-on-Wold.

Sên Ruben has set his soul against regret and sorrow, and regret and sorrow have left him.

He does not forget—he is not of that caliber—but he remembers in calmness, as he remembers in tenderness that still is quick, 'C'hi Yamei, in robes of lemon and blue and jade, yellow roses in her hands, her little Chinese dogs frisk-

ing about her as she walks, facing the sunrise among the bamboos and wild white roses of Shan-si.

He has chosen his life. He knows his future as the man whose character is strong and fine always may, because it builds that future, since always character is destiny.

While Sên Ruby lives he will be with her at Ashacres. When her spirit has gone to his father's he will make his last long earthly journey—across the Atlantic, across the Pacific, homing back to Ho-nan to live for Ho-nan, to live for the Sêns. Some boy of his clan shall be his by adoption, that Sên King-lo's grave and Sên Ruby's never shall lack descendants to worship at them.

For he will not go back to Ho-nan alone.

He has promised Sên Ruby—she demanded the promise—that her coffin and Sên King-lo's shall rest in one grave in the old Sên burial garden, beside the grave of Sên Ya Tin, with the temple and *pai-fang* the old Queen-one of Sênland builded to Sên King-lo, sending their jeweled shafts of love and understanding over the yellow roses, through the quivering bamboos, to lie on their graves.

## GLOSSARY

"BABIES"—peasants, servants.

CASH—a small coin.

CH'IH—a roofless paved courtyard. At great functions it is roofed and floored.

CHOP—official stamp of a merchant or man of high position. It binds every important Chinese contract and edict.

DRAGON THRONE—the throne of China.

GIRDLE-WEARERS—aristocrats.

GRASS-CHARACTERS—a fine and difficult form of Chinese writing.

HANLIN—a graduate of the Hanlin "college." One who has passed the highest Peking examinations.

HSIEN-JEN—wiseman, soothsayer, wizard who lives in a hill or mountain.

HSI HUA T'ING—a hall between gardens and walls where ceremonial meals are served.

I-PANG-LO—a musical instrument.

K'ANG—stove.

KIN—a musical instrument.

K'O-TANG—guest-hall. (In a modest establishment it is the one room of importance, and is put to many social and family uses.)

KO'TOW—prostration of great respect—to kneel and touch the ground with the forehead. (Also written Kor'ow, Kotow, etc.)

KUEI—the women's apartments. In good establishments it is a building of many rooms and verandas surrounding a courtyard.

KWAN or KWAN YIN-KO—the goddess of mercy. (There are varied spellings.)

LAMPS-OF-MERCY—fire-flies.

LANG—roofed passage.

LI—a Chinese measurement of distance, about one-third of a mile.

MEI-JÊN—match-maker, go-between, marriage broker.

PAI-FANG—a memorial arch of great honor, usually in commemoration of some act of great sacrifice.

PAN-KOU—a musical instrument.

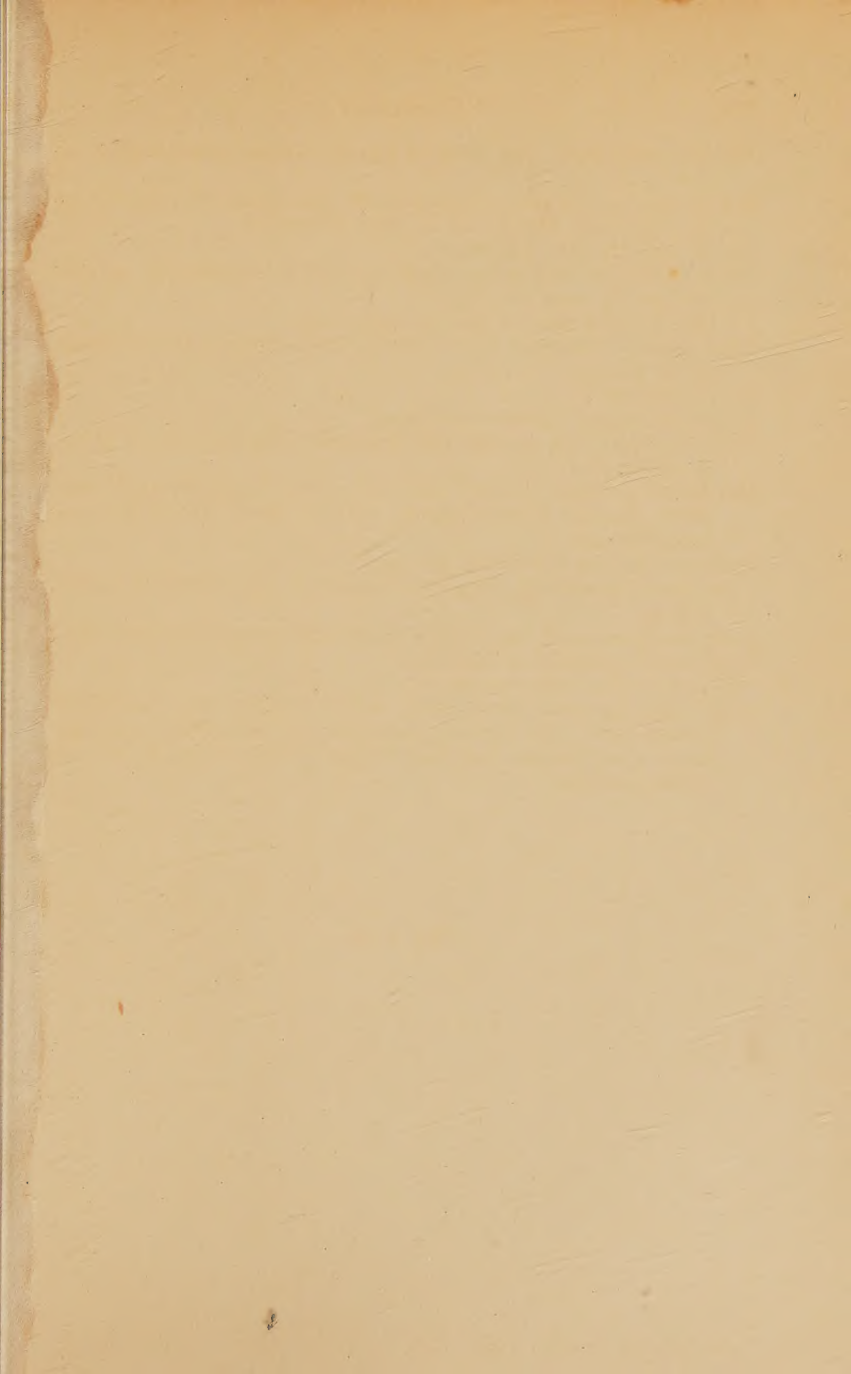
RUYE—an emblem of good luck, often made of jade. It never is large, but usually beautiful, and may be very valuable.

SACRED PRISONER—the Emperor of China.

SHU-CHIA—"Reverence books"—library, reading-room.

- "SILKS"—paintings. The greatest Chinese artists have painted on silk.
- SON OF HAN—a Chinese. They hold it their proudest title, except the Cantonese who do not so style themselves.
- SON OF HEAVEN—the Emperor.
- SPIRIT WALL—a devil screen placed outside an entrance to prevent evil spirits from entering.
- TA JEN—a great man—a man of importance.
- T'IENT CHING—"Heaven's Well"—the ladies' courtyard in the center of the KUEI.
- TING—courtyard.
- TINGCHAI—yamen runner—messenger.
- TING TZU LANG—the passage that leads from the Great Gate to the Reception Hall.
- TSA HSING—village of mixed families. (The inhabitants of the majority of small Chinese country villages usually are of only one family or clan.)
- TUCHUN—war lord—military governor.
- VERMILION PALACE—the Imperial Palace in the Forbidden City—Peking.
- YAMEN—official residence, usually a mandarin's—a government office.
- YANG-LAO-TI—nourish-old-age-land.
- "YELLOW-ROBES"—priests—monks.
- YUAN—the Chinese dollar (fifty cents). Often, but incorrectly, termed YEN. The YEN is a Japanese coin and strictly speaking there is no Chinese YEN, but "chopped YEN" are used in some parts of China.

THE END







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